

## Video: Protest Movements in Iran

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*Iran has been swept by protests since November 15<sup>th</sup>, with banks, stores and gas stations being set on fire. So far, more than 1,000 have been arrested and upwards of 12 people have died. Iranian authorities said 87,400 people were involved in the unrest across the country.*

People took the streets after the government-implemented increase in the price of fuel by 50%. According to the decision, vehicles for private use would be restricted to 60 liters of fuel monthly, while the price of petrol would jump 50% to 15,000 Iranian rials per liter. Any fuel in excess of those 60 liters would be charged with an additional 30,000 rials (\$0.26) per liter.

Judiciary Chief Ebrahim Raeisi said that the decision was taken hastily, without consulting the wide public, but that it was necessary. The move is intended to raise about \$2.5 billion a year for additional subsidies for 18 million families, or about 60 million Iranians on lower incomes. As of November 19<sup>th</sup>, the Iranian government began carrying out the direct payments to the 60 million poorest, of the country's 80 million population.

The current economic situation in Iran is a result of the ongoing US-led sanction war against the country. In 2018, Iran's \$1.63 trillion economy was reduced by 3.5%. Iran's inflation is officially upwards of 40%. The country's economy is projected to shrink by around 6% in 2019. Official oil exports have gone down from about 2.5 million barrels a day before the US left the nuclear deal to less than 200,000 barrels a day.

[https://southfront.org/wp-content/uploads/video/IMR\\_20\\_11\\_2019.mp4](https://southfront.org/wp-content/uploads/video/IMR_20_11_2019.mp4)

The current round of protests began in Tehran on November 15<sup>th</sup>, with citizens blocking main roads and destroying property. By November 17<sup>th</sup>, the protests had reached some 100 cities and towns, including Tabriz, Isfahan, Kermanshah, Sanandaj and Shiraz. At least 100 banks and 57 stores were set on fire.

The US publicly supported the demonstrations, with US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo even tweeting his support of the Iranian people. The Trump administration released a general statement condemning Tehran's alleged use of "lethal force" and its proven use of communications restrictions. US officials and mainstream media actively endorsed protestors make an attempt to overthrow the government.

Tehran called the US stance "hypocritical," highlighting that Washington's sanctions are the main reason for the unrest. Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei expressed his

support of the fuel price increase, saying that it was necessary, while condemning the violent protesters. There's been a wide internet shutdown since the protests began, with connectivity falling to only around 4-7% of normal levels.

Prior to now, protests in Iran have sporadically happened, expressing public discontent with the complicated economic situation.

There's been a tendency, beginning from December 2017, and they lasted until mid-January 2018. Protesters expressed their opposition to cuts to fuel and cash subsidies, contained in the 2018 budget proposal unveiled in mid-December 2017. The previous protests were similar in nature to these, but less violent. There were similar protests in August, November and December 2018. In all the cases, protests had no clear political agenda and were mostly focused on the economic and social situation.

On November 19, authorities announced that the calm has been restored across the most of the country. However, the situation remains unstable and more unpopular economic moves needed to counteract the US economic pressure on the country may cause a new round of riots. Iran is unlikely to comply with the US' demands for the "maximum pressure" campaign and trade the sovereignty to ease the sanctions.

The behavior of the US, which publicly calls on protestors to overthrow the Iranian government, is more common for a period of active war than for any kind of a peacetime public diplomacy. It demonstrates that Washington sees Iran as a country with which it is in a state of the military conflict. Such statements were unprecedented even towards the USSR during the Cold War. In fact, the US is waging an open aggressive hybrid war on Iran pushing the entire Middle East towards a further instability.

If Washington achieves its desired goal and anti-government protests in Iran expand and involve a large part of the population (20-30%), and the US continues endorsing them for more violence and regime-change attempts, there are notable chances that the cornered Iranian government will have to use the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps and the Army against rioters. In the event of a deep crisis threatening the existence of the Iranian state in the current form, the country's leadership may even opt to carry out a retaliatory strike on Israel, Saudi Arabia or US infrastructure in the region.

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