

The Causes of the Protests in Iran

(Translated)

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By: Ustadh Latif Al-Rasekh

Iran's regime interprets the new wave of protests that erupted there in late December as foreign interference. This rhetoric is not new to Iran's regime; it has used it for decades, starting with the Green Movement in 2009, and continuing through the protests of 2017, 2019, and 2022. In each of these events, the focus has been on the role of foreign powers seeking to destabilize and weaken the state. However, while this explanation is politically expedient for Tehran, it does not answer the question: Why are the protests increasingly encompassing broader segments of society, and why do they resurface time and again?

Initially, it is illogical to deny the influence of foreign interests on these events. Iran is a major player in the region, and there is no doubt that weakening its domestic stability would significantly disrupt the balance of power in the Middle East. For its geopolitical rivals, such as the Jewish entity and its partners, the domestic crisis in Iran signifies a decline in its power — a decrease in its ability to exert influence beyond its borders, a reduction in its involvement in regional conflicts, and a weakening of its capacity to defend its foreign policy objectives.

Added to this is the active role of a segment of the Iranian opposition abroad, which has been working for years to internationalize the country's domestic problems and portray the protests as evidence of the regime's complete loss of legitimacy. Foreign media outlets, online platforms, and political statements contribute to amplifying the impact of the protests, giving them further resonance and attracting broader international attention.

How crucial, however, is distinguishing between exploiting the crisis and its origins and root causes. Foreign powers may exploit the situation to serve their own interests, interpret it in a way that benefits them, and even contribute to escalating tensions through the media, but this does not necessarily mean they created the crisis itself.

How Plausible is the Foreign Conspiracy Theory?

The assertion that the protests in Iran are the result of centralized foreign management is entirely inconsistent with the reality on the ground. These movements lack unified leadership, a clear narrative, and a coordinated program. They appear sporadically in different parts of the country for varying reasons, often arising spontaneously. They involve social groups with radically different interests: from industrial workers and small merchants, to students and the retired. The protesters' demands range from purely economic issues, to general political slogans. This does not indicate organized foreign influence, but rather the accumulation of widespread popular discontent within society. The participation of diverse segments of society in

the protests makes it difficult for the authorities, as well as for foreign observers, to control or manage these movements.

The Main Reason for the Protests: Economic Deterioration

The basis of the current protests lies in a chronic economic crisis. For Iran, this crisis is no longer merely an abstract macroeconomic problem; it has become a crisis that affects the daily lives of the majority of Iranians. The sharp and continuous decline in the value of the local currency has shattered public confidence in the economic system, and effectively wiped out the savings of the middle class. In recent years, the Iranian rial has lost a significant portion of its value. In 2015, the dollar was trading between 30,000 and 35,000 rials, while by the end of 2022, it had surpassed 400,000 rials! The decline accelerated further in 2025; at the beginning of the year, the dollar was worth approximately 800,000 rials, and by the end of the year, it had exceeded 1.4 million rials on the free market! Thus, in a single year, the rial lost more than 40% of its value, and in a decade, it lost almost all of its previous purchasing power. This reality, coupled with the ensuing inflation rate exceeding 40%, has dealt a severe and direct blow to the standard of living.

High inflation rates and soaring prices for food, housing, and basic services have made the previous standard of living unattainable for millions of families. Real incomes have declined, and social mobility has virtually ground to a halt. In the current crisis, sanctions undoubtedly play a significant role, but they only serve to exacerbate existing domestic problems, including mismanagement, corruption, structural imbalances, and the economy's reliance on limited revenue streams. Consequently, economic discontent transforms from a temporary issue into a chronic, long-term condition, making protests and demonstrations almost inevitable.

In Conclusion

The protests in Iran must not be viewed as a plot imposed by foreign forces, but primarily as an indicator of the country's domestic structural problems. While foreign forces certainly have a stake in the current instability, and actively seek to exploit it for their own benefit, this is not the cause, but rather a consequence. Therefore, interpreting events solely as a foreign conspiracy allows the Iranian authorities to oversimplify the situation, and avoid addressing the fundamental economic, political, and institutional issues. These same issues, however, are what shape the social environment within Iranian society. In such an environment, protests are not a rare occurrence, but rather a recurring element of daily life in Iran. Under these circumstances, the name "Islamic" that the state bears, has become nothing more than a cosmetic, nominal element.