

Iranian regime's desperate tactics to derail the people's revolution

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In the past 232 days, the fierce crushing blows of the new revolution of the Iranian people are overturning the foundations of religious tyranny inside Iran.

At the time of writing, thousands of oil, gas and petrochemical workers have been on strike since April 11, demanding their basic rights.

But what has happened in these seven months and where is the new democratic revolution of the Iranian people going? What is the balance of power between the people and the regime? Will the regime succeed in repressing the people and delaying the process of its overthrow? What tactics and strategy has the regime used to divert the uprising of the Iranian people? And finally, where do the Iranian people fit into this equation?

Frustration and rage

Since the beginning of the uprising on September 25 last year, more than 750 protesters have been martyred by the security forces. The People's Mojahedin Organisation of Iran (PMOI/MEK) has published the names of more than 678 victims. Nearly 30,000 people have been arrested and a significant number of protesters injured — tens of thousands of whom do not have access to proper medical treatment.

An initial estimate shows that at least 1500 people — mostly women and girls — have lost one or both of their eyes due to gunshot wounds. However, uprisings, protests, strikes and street resistance are still ongoing — with strength and in different forms.

People's long-standing discontent toward the current theocratic regime that has ruled the country for four decades cannot be doubted. The protests have brought to the surface the deep frustration and rage that has been brewing under the surface for many years. The regime has responded with violence, suppression and economic policies that have led to widespread poverty. Despite these challenges, the people are demanding change and are determined as never before to continue the fight for the establishment of a free and democratic republic.

For years, Western governments, prompted by economic and other interests, refused to acknowledge that the people of Iran want regime change. Now, however, the prospects for change cannot be disputed.

Regime's strategy

In these circumstances, in addition to resorting to absolute repression — which reflects its paranoia over the resumption of the uprising — the regime has intensified its disinformation campaign against the resistance movement.

In its sights are the PMOI/MEK and the National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI). Its prime objective is to persuade the world that a democratic and viable opposition does not exist and, as such, *realpolitik* dictates the continuation of the status quo — namely, engaging with the current regime — as the only viable option.

In this political warfare, the regime uses every possible instrument, including its cyber army, as well as agents and operatives in Western countries posing as academics, human rights or women's rights advocates, journalists, etc.

Keenly aware of its own lack of credibility and legitimacy among the public, the regime has directed its operatives and talking heads to indirectly promote the remnants of the long-deposed and detested monarchy, aiming to undermine the organised resistance, which it fears as an existential threat.

Doing so benefits the regime in two ways:

1. It discourages the people in Iran by implying that any change might lead to a return to the former dictatorship; and
2. It creates a cloud over the opposition and propagates the narrative that the opposition is divided.

The recent actions of the Shah's son, Reza Pahlavi, including his recent trip to Israel, must be viewed in this context. The immediate reaction of all policymakers and politicians, as well as those following the situation in Iran, is that restoring the detested and deposed monarchy is not only unrealistic but impossible.

Even in Afghanistan, which is quite different to Iran, the initial efforts to bring back the previous monarch once the United States overthrew the Taliban in October 2001, completely failed.

In addition, it is common knowledge that the Iranian people vehemently resent the Pahlavis, who, according to the *New York Times*, stole US\$2–4 billion from the Iranian people, when the Shah left in 1979.

It is useful to examine how Reza Pahlavi and a few celebrities associated with him are wittingly or unwittingly playing into the hands of the Iranian regime and how, despite their rhetoric, their actions have been counterproductive to the cause of freedom and democracy in Iran.

A destructive and divisive illusion

Pahlavi and five other celebrities — a journalist, an actress, and a former soccer player among them — shared an identical Happy New Year message on Twitter in January.

At a conference at Georgetown University, Washington DC, on February 10, this group was joined by two others to declare the establishment of an "alliance", pledging to promptly release their charter for solidarity aimed at uniting all of the Iranian opposition.

The group unveiled its charter on March 10, and invited others to join them. They participated in several political forums, making one demand: that governments and political institutions acknowledge them, rather than the NCRI, as legitimate interlocutors.

Despite these efforts, the group was met with resounding indifference from the Iranian populace. Even an extensive publicity campaign, backed by a Saudi-funded Farsi television broadcaster, failed to bolster support for the group.

The main concern among Iranians about the alliance was Pahlavi's presence, because it evoked the dark days of his father's dictatorship. He has consistently refused to distance himself from his father's one-party system, actively endorsing and glorifying it. He has even referred to the 1979 revolution that toppled his father as sedition, which the Iranian people view as an insult.

The charter was also heavily criticised from all sides for failing to reject the dictatorship of the monarchical system. During nationwide protests, many Iranians were chanting "down with the oppressor, be it the Shah or Khamenei". This deliberate omission was seen as leaving the door open to another dictatorship.

Pahlavi announced in a tweet on April 10 that his ideas for expanding the alliance had been rejected by others. Consequently, he said he would work with other groups as well. His statement was widely seen as the nascent "coalition's" *coup de grace*.

In addition to Nazanin Boniadi, an actress and Amnesty International Ambassador, two other celebrities who were part of the alliance — actress Golshifteh Farahani and footballer Ali Karimi — have been noticeably absent since the beginning of March, showing zero activity on the political scene.

Finally, following Pahlavi's trip to Israel, Hamed Esmaeilion — president and spokesperson of the Association of Victims' Families of Flight PS752 — another member of the alliance, announced his departure from the group, on April 21.

Asked about his decision to leave, Esmaeilion explained that Pahlavi attempted to impose his views and associates on the group, with which other members disagreed. He further elaborated there was no serious discussion to create an organisational structure with a mission statement and by-laws for all members to abide by.

He said that monarchists rejected other Iranians as being unpatriotic. He also complained about systematic and destructive cyber-attacks by Pahlavi's associates against others to further their own agenda.

This totalitarian attitude was further highlighted during Pahlavi's trip to Israel, where a small group of his Iranian supporters presented him with a cake shaped like a crown and greeted him with chants of "*Javid Shah*" — meaning "Eternal be the King".

Pahlavi embarked on this road show to Israel in a desperate attempt to gain a degree of recognition, which his European tour had failed to accomplish. However, the trip to Israel backfired, as it reinforced the view that his primary objective and ambition is to become "King of the Kings", a title his father used before being overthrown by the Iranian people.

Resistance is key

The formation of a coalition among political groups in any country, particularly among groups opposing a dictatorship must have political, military, or organisational *gravitas*. Otherwise, it would only be on paper.

Moreover, it must be based on common principles and rooted in society, reflecting the desire of the people. It also must include political groups and individuals with a clear record of commitment to democratic values, as well as individuals willing to make the necessary sacrifices.

Above all, it must consist of groups and organisations engaged in resistance against the dictatorship. This is because in the absence of opportunities for free elections, legitimacy stems from resistance,

which entails a commitment to freedom and democracy.

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