

#No Mullahs, No Shah

Dictators attempt to hijack the popular political revolution in Iran with disinformation

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A nationwide uprising is ongoing in Iran, with protests in nearly all the provinces.

I have followed the Iranian resistance and attended their conferences for over 30 years. Their consistent aim is to overthrow the religious dictators and build a democracy. The ruling dictators of Iran have destroyed the economy through serious mismanagement and corruption. The national currency, the rial, is collapsing, having plummeted to a record low of more than 1.4 million rials to the US dollar. Also, mismanagement of water supplies and the environment has led to the drying up of rivers and lakes. Tehran, the capital of Iran, is on the verge of running out of water. In other cities, water is brought in by tankers.

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Hundreds of thousands of protesters are chanting “Death to the dictator,” and “Death to Khamenei,” and “No Mullah, No Shah.” The protesters are rejecting two dictators—the current ruling religious mullahs and an aspiring monarch dictator, the son of the former Shah of Iran. Reza Pahlavi, the wanna-be-king, has waited and watched from the wings as hundreds of thousands of

Iranians have organized, protested, and risked their lives for freedom, democracy, and a secular society. The mullah dictators want to retain power at any cost; the wanna-be-king wants to hijack the revolution and seize power.

The protesters are disadvantaged because they are anonymous inside Iran. Their faces are hidden, and there are no public spokespersons leading the chants or appearing in the media. It is too dangerous. If they are identified, the brutal regime will immediately arrest them. Political prisoners are regularly hanged in Iran. For example, in December, 67-year-old Zahra Tabari, a 67-year-old electrical engineer and women's rights activist, was sentenced to death after the police found a "Woman, Resistance, Freedom" banner in her house.

Underground resistance groups exist throughout Iran. Videos of protesters are always captured from behind, or they are slightly blurred to avoid the regime's police, the Basij, or intelligence agents, the IRGC (Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps), identifying them.

The wanna-be-king, Pahlavi, has little internal support in Iran, especially among the different ethnic groups. Yet, calls for his return started to be heard in the crowds. According to observers, small, organized groups of plainclothes agents infiltrated the crowd at the funeral of a pro-democracy attorney to shout pro-monarchy slogans. These agents were later seen cooperating with security forces during the subsequent crackdown on the mourners. This tactic serves a dual purpose: it disrupts authentic, anti-regime protests and provides content for satellite channels and social media platforms, specifically those promoting Reza Pahlavi, to broadcast as evidence of monarchist sentiment.

On the ground, protesters become confused and start to doubt if the goals are really for freedom and democracy. Online, when I access my social media accounts, I get flooded with pro-Pahlavi posts. It is very suspicious that, suddenly, there is a deluge of support for him. Also, many bloggers and podcasters have been duped into repeating claims that Pahlavi is the people's choice.

The National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI), the largest umbrella group supporting the overthrow of the theocratic dictatorship, has highlighted that the regime's Ministry of Intelligence (MOIS) manages thousands of fake social media accounts that present themselves as ultra-monarchist. These accounts are used to attack democratic opposition figures and promote the fake alternative of a restored monarchy, which the regime views as a non-threatening, controllable safety valve. By saturating the information space with these manufactured voices, the regime attempts to convince both the Iranian public and the international community that the only alternative to the mullahs is a return to the previous dictatorship, thereby discouraging the pursuit of a modern, democratic republic.

Furthermore, investigative reports have exposed the use of fake voice-overs and AI-manipulated videos to amplify the appearance of monarchist support. Organizations like the Citizen Lab and investigative outlets have noted that media channels supporting Reza Pahlavi frequently broadcast footage in which pro-monarchy audio has been layered over authentic protest videos. These deep fake tactics, often coordinated with bot networks, are used by Pahlavi-aligned media to claim a level of domestic popularity that does not exist on the ground. The National Council of Resistance of Iran has highlighted that the

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These fake media help the Iranian regime to argue that the dissent is a foreign-orchestrated pro-monocracy project rather than a genuine, grassroots demand for a secular, democratic Iran.

Millions of Iranians want the dictatorial mullahs to be gone. They want freedom and the opportunity to rebuild their failed economy. It will be a tragedy if disinformation and fake videos are used to disrupt the push for freedom and democracy.