



[Iranian Government Cracks Down on Protests Amid Threats of Foreign Intervention](#)

Security forces in Iran have carried out a systematic crackdown on nationwide protests that have emerged since late December. The suppression tactics have come amid and despite repeated threats of foreign intervention from U.S. President Donald Trump. Even in the face of this, the Iranian regime has chosen to adopt an overtly defiant and confrontational stance regarding its crackdown. It has used state media and official declarations to broadcast its intent to use lethal force and rapid executions to maintain control, with officials publicly signaling that detained protesters will face expedited trials and punishment. At the same time, authorities have sought to enforce a near-total information blackout to obscure the full scale of the lethal crackdown. Nevertheless, human rights and monitoring groups suspect that the death toll has already exceeded any previous round of unrest in decades. Many have contended that the longer the unrest continues, the higher the likelihood of outside intervention and as such, the regime has been keen to clamp down aggressively and swiftly.

Since late last week, authorities in Iran have instituted a near-total nationwide communications blackout as a means of suppressing and disrupting protests. The blackout has been noted for its unprecedented severity, reaching connectivity levels as low as 1% of normal traffic and extending to landline telephone services. In an effort to counter this and bypass the blackout, the Trump administration has coordinated with Elon Musk to provide anti-government protesters with upwards of 80,000 Starlink terminals – with Musk making the internet service free to users with receivers in Iran during the ongoing demonstrations. Using Russian and Chinese military-grade jamming technology, Iranian authorities have been able to block up to 90% of the Starlink signals and traffic, while government police have also worked to identify and arrest many users. They have reportedly used drones to patrol rooftops to locate and confiscate Starlink antennas, with security forces even conducting door-to-door raids to do so as well. With all of this, it is clear that the regime has employed these types of tactics to not only disrupt the protests and suppress details of its crackdown, but also to exert a high degree of control over the narrative surrounding the unrest.

Similarly to the use of the communications blackout to try to quell the unrest and maintain control, the regime has aimed to exploit threats of foreign intervention in order to consolidate its harsh response to the protests. Tehran has used the rhetoric coming from U.S. President Trump as an attempt to justify the use of maximum force and create its own counter-narrative

to the unrest. The regime has leveraged threats of foreign intervention to frame its domestic crackdown as a necessary defense of national sovereignty. This is particularly deployed internally within the regime itself to convince security forces that they are fighting an extension of an outside meddling entity, rather than their own citizens. For most fair and impartial observers, the truth lies somewhere in the middle – as there are certainly external agitators that have sought to capitalize on the unrest, but at the same time, the protests have also been fueled by genuine dissatisfaction from everyday citizens. This is why many peace activists feel that the threats of foreign intervention are harmful and counterproductive, as they provide the regime in Tehran with an excuse to present justifications for its suppression.

The precarious circumstances prompted the U.S. to announce plans to withdraw some personnel from its military bases in the Middle East. This came after senior Iranian officials warned several regional countries that they would strike American bases in the case of an attack by the United States. Amid these rising tensions, some of the aforementioned regional countries such as Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Oman have engaged in diplomatic efforts to prevent what would be a catastrophic broader regional war – urging de-escalation from all parties and seeking to dissuade the Trump administration against military action given the destabilizing impact that it would have on the entire region. Over the past two days, reports have indicated that the security warning level at U.S. military bases in Qatar and elsewhere in the region were lowered after President Trump suggested that the situation in Iran might be easing, with some aircraft and staff beginning to return. Additionally, after a temporary closure on January 14th due to fears of potential imminent U.S. strikes, Iran reopened its airspace to commercial traffic yesterday. Still, in the midst of all of this, both the United States and Iran remain on high alert due to the fluid nature of the situation, though these recent signs of a possible easing of tensions have emerged and been cautiously welcomed.