



PERSPECTIVES

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Demonstrations in Iranian Khuzestan Demand an End to the Islamic Regime

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: Amid a fifth wave of the coronavirus pandemic, nightly demonstrations are occurring inside Iran—especially in the oil-rich southwestern province of Khuzestan. The protests initially concerned a water shortage and power outages, but have since turned into demonstrations demanding an end to the Islamist regime.

At least [eight protesters are believed to have been killed](#) by the Islamic Republic of Iran's security forces in the Iranian province of Khuzestan, where protests initially triggered by resource shortages have morphed into demands for the destruction of the fundamentalist regime.

Environmental problems can have serious ramifications for national and international peace and stability, and the importance of environmental security is [stressed](#) by the UN. The Islamic regime in Iran defies this concern by deliberately neglecting environmental and ecological problems, to the detriment of the Iranian people.

This is consistent with the regime's behavior throughout its rule, as it has never concerned itself with the needs of Iranian citizens. Instead, it has prioritized its own survival at all costs and the imperialistic dissemination of Shiite Islam throughout the rest of the world. This has given rise to many anti-regime uprisings and demonstrations in Iran over the years at which the people have demanded, at risk of their lives, that their voices be heard.

Most recently, regular demonstrations have been occurring in the oil-rich province of Khuzestan, which borders the Persian Gulf and Iraq. The demonstrations started early this summer but escalated on July 15. They have continued daily, garnering support across Iran.

The initial protests

Khuzestan has been suffering from a severe water shortage in conjunction with other socioeconomic problems. Water is of course vital for human survival, but also essential for agriculture, livestock farming, fishing, and industry. In a country like Iran, where [poverty](#) is a serious problem, lack of water means power blackouts, unemployment, and marginalization. The water shortage, amid a fifth wave of the coronavirus pandemic, pushed the people of Khuzestan to the breaking point.

On July 28, 2010, through [Resolution 64/292](#), the UN General Assembly declared access to water a human right. In defiance of this resolution, the Islamic regime has persistently ignored the water crisis in Iran as well as other environmental problems. While doing nothing to alleviate the water shortage, the regime has blamed it on drought, climate change, and [sanctions](#).

The regime whitewash

On July 19, 2021, then-president [Hassan Rouhani](#) told officials of the Ministry of Agriculture Jihad that the water shortage had been brought on by drought. He said,

[U]nfortunately, we are going through very difficult conditions this year. The conditions are special because of the drought. The current drought is almost unprecedented in the last 50 years. This year, compared to last year, rainfall has decreased by 52%. For this reason, we have experienced problems with both water and electricity.

The people of Khuzestan did not accept Rouhani's explanation, viewing it as another attempt to whitewash the regime's responsibility for the crisis. Similar statements have been made by other regime officials with no improvement in Iran's water management.

Most of Iran is arid or semi-arid. Drought has been a problem for decades if not centuries. The Islamic regime should have taken measures long ago to mitigate natural disasters and prevent water scarcity and power blackouts.

Even before the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979—that is, before the toppling of the Iranian monarchy—drought was a serious threat to the people of Iran. But unlike the current Islamic regime, the Shah of Iran, Muhammad Reza Pahlavi, and his government paid close attention to the environmental threats facing Iran. Modern-day Iranians are aware of this, and they want to know why the Islamist establishment refuses to prioritize their interests in its domestic and foreign policies.

In his book [*The Fall of Heaven: The Pahlavis and the Final Days of Imperial Iran*](#) (2016), Andrew Scott Cooper wrote about how concerned the Shah was about Iran's environmental problems and vulnerability to natural disasters. Cooper noted that every morning, the Shah read weather reports from across the country:

He [the Shah] knew exactly how many millimeters had fallen in each city in each province. He knew the amount of water in each of the dams. He knew because he had built them all, twenty-one to date, and often during rainy seasons or after a big snowfall he liked to fly across the country in his executive jet to check the water levels from the air.

While the Islamic regime has also built dams and carried out water-related mega-projects, it has done so despite frequent [warnings from scientists](#) that the projects themselves have negative environmental implications.

Kaveh Madani, an environmental scientist at Imperial College and former deputy head of the Islamic regime's Department of Environment, recently [tweeted](#) an appeal emphasizing the lack of proper water management in Iran. He said,

If you're an analyst/journalist trying to report what's going on in [#Khuzestan](#) (Iran) right now, PLEASE don't be a reductionist! What we see has been caused by decades of bad water management, poor environmental governance & lack of foresight, not sanctions & climate change.

In a 2014 research article, [Madani](#) wrote,

The government blames the current crisis on the changing climate, frequent droughts, and international sanctions, believing that water shortages are periodic. However, the dramatic water security issues of Iran are rooted in decades of disintegrated planning and managerial myopia. Iran has suffered from a symptom-based management paradigm, which mainly focuses on curing the problem symptoms rather than addressing the main causes.

Corruption and the water mafia

In view of the severity of the problem, why doesn't the Islamic regime have a comprehensive water management program, and why has it ignored the main causes of the water crisis? Some analysts blame widespread corruption among the regime elite.

According to Nik Kowsar, an award-winning Iranian-Canadian journalist and water analyst, the regime's careless and extravagant water projects are the main reason for Iran's current water crisis. He believes these projects are led by a "water mafia" that includes many officials and state institutions, including the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC). In an article for the Middle East Institute, [Kowsar](#) wrote:

The IRGC and its partners have long silenced any criticism of their dam projects, but the reformists have done the same too. Cost-benefit assessments have not been made public, and one administration after another has approved the development of these mega-structures. [...]

The water projects continue to this day and there are currently plans to dig a system of tunnels to transfer water from the Karun basin to the central Iranian plateau, where water is scarce. This is itself partially due to the Islamic Republic's own water management policies, which have drained the aquifers in an effort to realize the dream of Iranian self-sufficiency espoused by its leaders. As a result, many experts now see the IRGC as an environmental menace willing to destroy Iran's water resources just to line its own pockets.

The current protests and the regime's brutality

The protesters in Khuzestan, who are aware that the regime elite is corrupt and lacks any willingness to prioritize the people's welfare over its own imperialist policies, have changed the character of their demonstrations. Since at least July 15, the protests have explicitly targeted Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei and demanded the abolition of the Islamic regime. All over Iran, protesters can be heard chanting, "[Death to the Islamic Republic](#)" "[Death to the dictator](#)," and "[We do not want the Islamic Republic](#)." The protesters have gone as far as to call Ali Khamenei a "[pimp](#)," one of the worst profanities in Iran and a reflection of the depth of the protesters' hatred.

These protests are the most recent iteration of major countrywide anti-regime demonstrations that took place in June 1999, the summer of 2009, the winter of 2017-18, November 2019, and January 2020. Each time, the Islamic regime claimed, without evidence, that the peaceful protesters were foreign mercenaries. The regime then cut off the Internet and massacred the people. In November 2019, for instance, it is believed that [1,500 protesters were killed](#) by regime security forces.

It is now feared that a new massacre will take place. [At least eight people are believed to have been killed so far](#). Social media are full of clips and photos showing the Islamic regime's security forces using lethal force against the

protesters. Ever since July 15, Iranian mobile internet services have experienced [disruptions](#), making it difficult for Iranians to get the message out about what is being done to them. Despite the lack of world attention, the Iranian people are continuing to fight for their freedom and human rights.

Conclusion

Poverty is on the rise in Iran because of regime policies. At the same time, a serious water shortage is causing disruption and loss of income in both agriculture and industry. Unemployment in urban areas, especially among young people, is growing because of migration from rural areas, where the situation is many times worse—a problem that causes widespread frustration. The people's social lives are restricted by sharia law, and political oppression occurs every single day.

While the citizens of Iran are tormented by economic hardship, social restrictions, and political oppression, the regime elite—richly benefiting from decades of corruption—enjoys lives of luxury, both inside and outside Iran.

It is against this background that the current protests and water shortage must be understood. As [Thomas Homer-Dixon](#) wrote back in 1996,

[...] scarcity is often caused by a severe imbalance in the distribution of wealth and power that results in some groups in a society getting disproportionately large slices of the resource pie, while others get slices that are too small to sustain their livelihoods. Such unequal distribution—or what we call structural scarcity—is a key factor in every case our research team has examined.

As long as there is an imbalance in the distribution of Iranian wealth and power, uprisings against the Islamic regime will continue to occur. This may or may not eventually lead to the fall of the regime, but until a conclusion of some kind is reached, the people of Iran will continue to suffer from the regime's cruelty and brutality. This suffering will unfortunately be [prolonged](#) if the Biden administration and the EU enter into a nuclear agreement with Iran and lift US sanctions against the regime.

Arvin Khoshnood has extensively researched the Islamic regime's domestic, foreign, and security policies, with a special focus on how the regime uses poverty as an instrument of domestic dominance. He holds degrees in political science, human geography, and intelligence analysis from Lund University in Sweden and is fluent in Persian. @arvinkhoshnood