

Who Opposes Iran's Government?

Mohammad Marandi

In this in-depth interview, Iranian scholar Mohammad Marandi breaks down the latest protests in Iran and places them within the wider context of U.S. imperial strategy and regime-change operations. We discuss who is protesting inside Iran, the social and ideological composition of the opposition, and the external forces backing and amplifying unrest. Marandi draws direct parallels between Iran and recent developments in Venezuela, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh, arguing that these cases reveal a consistent American playbook for destabilizing sovereign states. The conversation also examines whether the U.S. and Israel will escalate beyond protest support, potentially following the Venezuela model of sanctions, economic warfare, and political sabotage—or even military confrontation. We analyze the role of Gulf monarchies, their strategic alignment with Washington and Tel Aviv, and how they may participate in efforts to weaken Iran. This interview offers a critical perspective rarely heard in Western media, challenging dominant narratives around protests, democracy, and “humanitarian intervention.” Topics covered: Who is protesting in Iran—and why Foreign backing of protests and information warfare The American Empire's global strategy Venezuela, Sri Lanka & Bangladesh comparisons U.S.–Israel regime-change tactics Iran's opposition forces and ideology The Gulf states' role in confronting Iran Subscribe for independent geopolitical analysis beyond Western media narratives.

#Mudiar Jyotishman

Hello and welcome to another episode of *India and Global Left*. If you're new to the show, please smash that subscribe button. Also, consider becoming a YouTube member, a patron, or donating a small amount using the link in the description box. Let me welcome our guest tonight, Professor Mohammad Marandi. Professor Marandi teaches at the University of Tehran, Iran. Professor Marandi, welcome back to *India and Global Left*.

#Mohammad Marandi

Thank you very much for inviting me.

#Mudiar Jyotishman

I wanted to start by asking you: what is the right framework to understand the events that have happened in Iran? There's the narrative of peaceful protests, and there's the pro-Iranian government narrative of foreign-backed riots. Do either of these binaries capture the reality? How would you describe what's going on in Iran?

#Mohammad Marandi

Well, first and foremost, I think we should always keep in mind that the same people who've been trying to deny that there's a genocide going on in Gaza for well over two years are the ones making all these claims that in Iran these are just peaceful protesters, and that the government is killing peaceful protesters on the streets. And therefore, if anyone still has faith in Western media after Gaza, I think they're just irredeemable. We can't wake them up to reality; their eyes will remain closed. But the fact is, these are indeed Western-backed terrorists and rioters who have been carrying out slaughter on the streets of different cities. Murder and destruction have been happening everywhere they've set foot—or had been, because the riots and the terror have ended.

It ended on Friday last week, on the 9th of January. So it was basically Thursday and Friday when there was a lot of looting, slaughter, and mass destruction. This really began earlier, though, with a sudden fall in the Iranian currency, which dropped by about 30 to 40 percent. It turned out this was a manipulation from abroad. The Americans were using the Emirates, northern Iraq, and apparently even Afghanistan, to put pressure on the Iranian currency. After that, we had small protests in Tehran, and these protests passed off peacefully—maybe 1,000, 2,000, 3,000 people, I don't know, but small numbers. There was no police harassment and no arrests. The government said people, business owners, and shopkeepers had a right to protest because the currency situation was dangerous for business.

On the second day, there were still more protests, and there was still a lot of pressure on the currency. That continued for a few days. Then we saw the sudden appearance of rioters—very professional, very well organized, and armed with machetes, guns, axes, everything. They were very violent, especially on Thursday and Friday. In Tehran alone, we saw tens of fire engines destroyed—very expensive ones that are hard to replace because of the sanctions—and dozens of public buses. People were being shot at by these rioters; many police officers were killed. Footage of it has been coming out gradually from the police and intelligence. So, after a couple of days of peaceful protests with no arrests, no police harassment, and no conflict, we saw the infiltration of very well-trained groups of rioters.

They were very violent, and the violence peaked last Thursday and Friday, the 8th and 9th of January. There's a huge Persian-language media apparatus in the West—billions of dollars are spent on Persian media against Iran—and they were pushing for the riots. They were advocating the riots and spreading misinformation. The rioters became very aggressive. They started burning down banks and clinics. In one clinic, they burned alive a young nurse. She got trapped and went upstairs to the top floor, but the fire reached her and burned her alive. They burned down many schools and educational centers—250 of them within two days, literally. They also burned down many mosques.

In one mosque, they trapped two young men inside and kept throwing Molotov cocktails until the men burned alive. They cut off people's heads. They smashed people's heads, crushed them with stones, swords, and axes. It was extraordinary—and the footage is there. The police are gradually

releasing footage; first they check it, identify people, and try to find the killers. Today they've arrested some of them. Yesterday they arrested others, and then they release the footage for people to see. It's really horrific. One physician I know operated on a number of people. He said many of the injuries—and a couple of the deaths in his hospital—were from pistols. They had been shot at from close range, often from behind.

And it's clear that these people were hunting others down on the streets and telling people to create chaos. They were burning banks—they even burned trees. And as I said, it was just total chaos. Dozens of fire engines were burned just in Tehran, and dozens of public buses too. And then, of course, what makes it most fascinating is that the Western media is basically saying these were peaceful protesters. But the Israeli regime begs to differ. Pompeo, who was the head of the CIA, said that Mossad is on the ground with these rioters. Mossad itself put out a Persian-language statement, which I tweeted—I've tweeted all of these—saying that they're on the ground.

Channel 14 of the Israeli regime said that a foreign government—guess who—sent in all sorts of weapons that killed hundreds of police officers, law enforcement officers, and volunteers. And therefore, they're admitting it. They're bragging about it. Then you see these Western pundits getting upset that the Israelis are ruining their fake narrative of "peaceful protesters." So the Israeli regime is saying it, an American former head of the CIA is saying it, and the footage coming out of Iran clearly shows these people killing others. I've seen some of the footage myself, though I can't post some of it because X won't confirm my age.

People are very angry and outraged. And how do we know they're outraged? Because on Sunday we had mass protests—last Sunday, a week ago—across the country against the rioters and in support of the Islamic Republic, the constitution, and state institutions. There were about 2.3 to 3 million people in Tehran. It took me a couple of hours just to get there, and a couple of hours to get back. And when I was coming back after the rally, people were still trying to get there. And imagine, a lot of these people are working class. They're struggling to make ends meet because of the sanctions and the hardship the West imposes. But they came anyway.

They used up half a day of their time to make a political statement. And it wasn't just Tehran—every city across the country had its own independent rally. No one came to Tehran; they held the same rallies everywhere. And in every place where there had been major riots, the rallies were even bigger. The numbers were extraordinary—many millions of people were out on the streets. But all of this is something Western media and pundits are hiding. And I think it's quite clear that the whole currency manipulation happened when Netanyahu went to Washington, right? He met Trump, and then we had the currency manipulation. Right after that, we saw these well-organized rioters and terrorists coming out onto the streets across the country, using the "peaceful protest" as an opportunity.

And then one final point. We have their admissions, and we have footage. We have the Trump and Netanyahu meetings. But one more thing—on Thursday night, the Iranians cut off the... I mean, I

don't remember exactly what time the internet was cut off. But when they did, we saw a rapid decline in the riots. And on Friday, even though they were very vicious—maybe even more vicious than Thursday night—they were smaller in number. And then on Saturday, the whole thing fell apart. So since last Saturday, which is now about ten days, it's been quiet. On Saturday, maybe there were a few gatherings here and there across the country in smaller numbers, but there was no major violence or anything.

And then from Sunday onwards, total quiet. All the things people are hearing about from Tehran—people being killed—it's all fake. Iran, the whole country, is completely peaceful. So the cutting off of the internet—what does that show? Coinciding with the collapse of these riots, it shows they were getting their orders from abroad. They were being coordinated from abroad. These rioters, they're different groups: you have the Mujahideen terrorist organization, that cult in the West; you have Kurdish separatist groups; you have the monarchists; you have the Wahhabi, Salafi, Takfiri groups in Balochistan; and you have the remnants of ISIS. All of them were active.

And they hate each other, but they were being coordinated from abroad. Then this sudden collapse basically meant that those abroad couldn't tell them what to do anymore. So what was happening, for example, in the city of Rasht—there were riots in one area, the police would go there, and then they'd be told, "OK, go to this other place." They'd go and attack a market, and they burned down an entire market. But when communications were cut, they could no longer get the kind of orders they were getting before. And so they became headless. After a few hours—after 12 to 24 hours—the whole thing fell apart.

#Mudiar Jyotishman

We've seen these kinds of destabilization efforts from the West elsewhere recently. There's been a series of countries, in different forms, but all related to Western imperialism. Sri Lanka was one case where neoliberal economic policies imposed on them, along with capital flight from private creditors, led to a currency crisis. That in turn led to protests, which were then used for political motives—to move Sri Lanka away from BRICS and from China in particular. We've seen similar things in Bangladesh, and more recently in Venezuela, with the direct kidnapping of President Nicolás Maduro. In the larger scheme of things, at a time when many argue that the U.S. empire is in decline—especially when viewed from the perspective of China—how does the U.S. empire look from the perspective of Iran, and what is it doing in the region?

#Mohammad Marandi

I think it's clear that it's rapidly declining, but as it declines, it's becoming much more vicious. The pretense of being civilized and supportive of human rights—all that is gone. We just saw how Trump himself said, "Now that I haven't been given the Nobel Peace Prize, I'll behave differently." He's a crude person, but he reflects something much bigger, and that is how the West has removed the mask. In the case of Iran, I think it's quite clear that the objective of this whole thing—the Trump-

Netanyahu meeting, the manipulation of the Iranian Riyal, and then the riots—was coordinated. These rioters were obviously very well trained; many of them had arms. At least 300 to 400 policemen and volunteers were murdered. Imagine if this had happened in the United States.

If you multiply it by four, taking the U.S. population into account, that would be, let's say, 1,200 to 1,500 police officers murdered in two days in the United States. What would be the response? Remember, just recently, the ICE troops—one of them shot a woman in the face—and Trump justified it. So did his supporters, saying she wasn't turning to the right fast enough. Yet in Iran, they murdered 300 to 400 officers of the law, and they murdered many innocent people. As I said, they burned a nurse alive, they cut off people's heads. This, I think, was to create chaos in the country to justify war. So Netanyahu, Trump, the neocons, and the Zionists wanted to create chaos in Iran to destabilize the country, and then that would justify war.

Trump could carry out heavy airstrikes, and then it would be, in their dreams, an overthrow of the political establishment. But the Iranians outsmarted them. First, they cut off the internet, but they also have massive popular support in Iran. The crowds—anyone can go back to Press TV and look at the rolling coverage from last Sunday. And it's not just Press TV; it's Al Alam, and also foreign media. RT was there, in Arabic and English, CCTV was there, CGTN was there, Al Jazeera English was there, Al Jazeera Arabic was there, Al Mayadeen was there, Turkish reporters were there. The West can't pretend that the state doesn't have popular support. In any case, I think this was a conspiracy to attack Iran.

But now that it has failed, we have to see what the United States does. I still think the chances are very high that the United States will carry out an attack on the country. The Iranians have warned the Americans through different channels that this would be an all-out war. President Pesachian has said this, and so have others. So if the United States strikes, then I think we should expect a global economic collapse, because there will no longer be oil and gas coming from the Caucasus, the Persian Gulf, or the Red Sea. I think we'll see a major economic depression, worse than 1929. That's how I see it, if there is a war between the United States and Iran.

#Mudiar Jyotishman

And what forms of attack can you imagine? Do you see a full-blown bombing along with kidnappings, as we've seen in Venezuela, or an assassination campaign like the one the Israeli-U.S. regime has been carrying out in West Asia? What could be some of the forms of attack, or would it be a full-scale military assault? What are your thoughts?

#Mohammad Marandi

Well, first of all, murdering the leader isn't going to change anything, because Iran has a constitution. It has strong state structures, and it has popular support. Whether the West wants to acknowledge it or not, they'll soon find out if they carry out an attack. And Iran has allies across the

region—especially in Iraq. We saw in the recent elections that Iran's allies won, so Iraq is a place where the Americans will be very vulnerable. I don't know what will happen. I don't know if there will be an attack. I can't predict the future, obviously. But the threat is there.

And Iran is preparing for a full-scale war because that's the best way to prevent one. Iran doesn't want war. But remember, this is something the West has started. The whole problem between Iran and the West has two main causes. One is that Iran is independent—it's one of the few countries in the world, if not the only one, that is truly and fiercely independent. And second, Iran supports the Palestinian people and opposes wars against peoples across the world, in accordance with its constitution and the ideology of the state. That's why Iran supports Venezuela, Cuba, resistance movements in southern Africa, and of course Palestine. And that's Iran's real sin.

So the threat of war should be taken very seriously. And I also think it's really interesting that the Western media is creating this fake narrative that Iran is killing peaceful protesters. But in reality, what the Western media is doing—like in Gaza—is blaming the victim. Western and Israeli terrorists, and funded, professional, trained rioters, slaughtered large numbers of people, including hundreds of police officers and volunteers who were protecting the streets. Hundreds. Footage is coming out. I've put out at least, I don't know, 20 or 30 different clips. It's clear what they were like.

And we saw popular support on the streets. This just shows that Western media is a tool of empire and that we should ignore it. In our understanding of one another—of countries across the Global South, whether it's Venezuela, Palestine, Iran, or tomorrow Cuba or Yemen or elsewhere—Western media will do exactly what the oligarchs in the United States and the West want. So Iran is not going to worry too much about what Western media says about the country. They are preparing for war, and they have warned the United States, its allies, and those who have cooperated with it in this—apparently including MI6, which was deeply involved.

And of course, Mossad—the Mossad—along with the CIA. There's talk of other agencies, but these three are pretty clear. They're involved. So Iran is warning the West that if you start a war, it will be an all-out war for us. We're in a very dangerous situation. I can't predict—Trump has threatened cyber warfare—but we also saw that at times Trump backed down a bit after the massive anti-riot protests and the protests in support of the state. We saw Trump admit that the shooting was coming from both sides. I don't know if you recall that. And although Western media—again, their fake narrative—is very solid.

They won't admit that. I think, though, the Financial Times did, in an article a couple of days ago—which I retweeted—the part where they admitted that these people were on the streets, dressed in black, like commandos, these terrorists. But in any case, right now we're in a situation where the fate and lives of everyone on this planet will somehow be affected by the decision made in the White House. And people may ask, well, why would the White House do something like that if it's going to cause such devastation throughout the world and in the United States? It's clear—because the decision makers are Israel-first.

These people don't care about Americans or the American people. They don't care about Europeans. They don't care about anyone. They care about the Israeli regime. So everyone can be devastated as long as it serves the interests of that regime. I don't think it will serve those interests, because a collapse in the global economy would have implications that are devastating for it—its backers would be devastated too. And the world will blame the United States for the war. And the devastation—again, it's not going to be Iran bombing a few bases. The devastation will be the end of oil and gas reaching markets across the world from West Asia and the Caucasus.

#Mudiar Jyotishman

I wanted to ask you a little bit about the rioters—their size and the kind of legitimacy they're given. My own impression is that Iran is different from Venezuela in this regard, based on electoral records. My impression is that in Venezuela the opposition is much bigger—slightly more than 50% on the Chavista-Madurismo side, slightly less than 50% based on those who voted. It seems to me that the opposition the U.S. and the West are trying to manipulate within Iran is smaller. You mentioned the MEK, tech PV groups, ISIS, and so on.

Can you explain a little bit more about their ideologies, their nature, their size, and the public sentiment in Iran vis-à-vis these groups? Because we've been hearing from the Trump administration that they're there to save the Iranian people. The irony is that even the protests you mentioned at the beginning were caused by the crushing U.S. sanctions in the first place. So you impose sanctions, crush the economy, and then use that to justify a regime change operation. So if you could, tell us a little more about the opposition in Iran.

#Mohammad Marandi

Sure. One thing I'd like to add before answering the question is that in Venezuela—because I've been there a few times and stay in constant contact with friends there—many of the government's former opponents now support it, because they're so outraged by U.S. behavior. So it's not just half or a little over half anymore; the country is largely united against the United States. In the case of Iran, it's quite clear why these groups don't have support. First of all, in Iran we have many political parties, and there's a broad, competitive political environment. Right now, Mr. Pezeshkian is affiliated with one camp, and before him, President Raisi was affiliated with another.

Both are somewhat centrist, but they're from different camps. So in Iran, you do have a very broad political environment that allows people to make very different choices—choices that have serious implications for how the country is run. And then we have to look at the people the West is supporting. The MEK cult—back in the early 1980s, they started an armed insurrection. Then they went to Iraq and fought for Saddam Hussein against their own country. Is that going to make them

popular among the Iranian people? Supporting Saddam Hussein, of all people, against their own country—someone who invaded it? So they have no credibility. Then there are the monarchists—the son of the Shah, a playboy who's not very smart.

He has serious family problems, which I don't want to talk about. His father was subservient to the United States, and so was his grandfather—both very brutal. He hasn't been to Iran for almost half a century. And he went to, you know, Palestine, and then to, you know, basically Tel Aviv. Is that going to give him any credibility in Iran? Then there are the ISIS remnants and these Kurdish terrorists based in northern Iraq, funded by and working closely with the United States and the Israeli regime. These are the forces that have been used for the riots. Does anyone really believe that any of these groups have any credibility or legitimacy in the eyes of Iranians?

Of course not. But that's the problem with empire. The empire can never control someone who's independent—someone who really cares about his or her own country—and therefore they can never be tools of a foreign power. The only people who are willing to be tools of a foreign power are people who have no credibility among their own people. Just like the Nobel Peace Prize winner this year—she has no credibility among the people of Venezuela, simply because she was advocating airstrikes against her own country.

So people who are calling—and the Shah's son is also calling—for the United States to bomb Iran, does anyone in their right mind think that Iranians would support that? You know, you'll find extremists everywhere, and foolish people everywhere. But the overwhelming majority of Iranians will never join the MEK cult, or the monarchists, or ISIS, or these Kurdish terrorists affiliated with the United States and Israel. It's clear as day. That's one reason why so many people came to the streets last Monday—because they wanted to make a political statement that they're not going to allow this to happen.

#Mudiar Jyotishman

We're almost out of time, so one quick question. Some media outlets say the U.S. Gulf allies have been trying to persuade the U.S. not to attack Iran. You've mentioned some of these countries being used as financial bases to destabilize the Iranian currency. What kind of role do you expect the U.S. Gulf allies to play at this moment?

#Mohammad Marandi

These are all family dictatorships, and some of them are quite tiny. They're very dependent on oil and gas. Some of these family dictatorships host millions of foreigners. In the case of the Emirates, there are about one million Emirati passport holders and many millions of foreigners. The same is true in Bahrain—sorry, in Qatar—and so on. If there's no more oil or gas, these regimes won't last.

They'll be gone forever—days, in fact. They may even end up being non-Arab countries, because the majority of the people there aren't from the Arabian Peninsula. So it's obvious that all of them are very worried. They don't want war, because they know that Iran is dead serious. This would be a fight for survival, and Iran is not going to pull any punches. On the other hand, they're also very worried because, despite their foolishness in previous decades—supporting ISIS and al-Qaeda in Syria, and the genocidal war in Yemen that Turkey and Qatar also supported in 2015—when the differences between the Emirates, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar emerged, Qatar and Turkey split away from them.

In the past, these countries were targeting Iran, of course, on behalf of the United States and in coordination with the United States. But now they're worried about Israel—the Israeli regime. Everyone knows that if Iran is weakened, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and the region as a whole are going to be in serious trouble. So they're all worried about the Israeli regime, and they're all worried about their own fate. As I said, Iran is not going to pull any punches. If we have a war and a global economic collapse, people across the West will recognize that their leaders brought this upon them. It will not end well for anyone, but especially not for those who initiated the conflict. And I think Trump would be the first person people will be seeking out, wondering why he destroyed the global economy.

#Mudiar Jyotishman

We'll leave it there, Professor Marandi. Thank you so much for your time. Thank you very much for having me.

#Mohammad Marandi

It's always a pleasure.

#Ayushman

Hi, my name is Ayush Mann. I, along with Mudiar Jyotishman, have started this platform. Over the last two years, we've tried to build content for the left and progressive forces. We've interviewed economists, historians, political commentators, and activists so far. If you've liked our content and want us to build an archive for the left, I have two requests for you. Please consider donating to the cause—the link is in the description below. And if you're not able to, don't feel bad. You can always like and share our videos with your comrades. Finally, don't forget to hit the subscribe button.