



By: Tomorrow's Affairs Staff

Can the regime in Tehran survive the youth protests?



Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian says there is not going to be regime change in Iran. On the other side, prince Reza Pahlavi, the son of the late Shah of Iran, said that nationwide strikes alongside nationwide protests "will bring this regime to its knees". What will happen with the mass protests in Iran having these two diametrically opposed views on their future and effects on the regime in Tehran? The Washington Post estimates that the anger of the young protesters "may reflect a social explosion more so than a political movement. But that makes it no less potent". "A revolutionary turn does not necessarily depend on the number of active protesters; it arises from a dead-end situation," wrote Iran-based journalist Mahzad Elyassi. For Hamid-Reza Taraghi, a hardline politician, the number of protesters is important.

He says for The Financial Times that there are 4.5mn students in the country. "Even if 50,000 of them seek to overthrow the system, it is not a high figure". However, the figures that speak of victims, injured and arrested protesters, show that it is a big wave of protests, the largest in Iran in a long time. Dozens were killed (52, according to Amnesty International), hundreds were arrested, including 92 activists of civil organizations, journalists and lawyers, according to human rights organizations. These targeted arrests have a chilling effect, civil society members say, scaring others into silence.

One newspaper journalist in Tehran contacted by The Washington Post said he had been asked not to discuss any recent issues with foreign media. The arrests have had the same effect on lawyers, at least four of whom have been arrested since Mahsa Amini's death.

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The rawness of the rage makes it hard to predict where the protests will go. Analysts see the movement as operating without real

leadership and with little coordination or influence from the vast and politicized Iranian diaspora. "One of the most astonishing aspects of the current movement is that it is overwhelmingly composed of young Iranians under age twenty-five who identify themselves as more than just opponents of Islamist ideology, they are also avowedly alien to the mindset of the older generation, including anti-regime politicians," wrote Mehdi Khalaji of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy.

Despite the protests and the anger, analysts caution that the Islamic republic is not on the verge of collapse. "The Islamic republic may not be a democratic state but has its deep roots and vast networks from the richest segments of the society to the most remote villages," said for FT Hamid-Reza Jalaeipour, a sociologist. "Those who seek regime change still form a minority. The majority of Iranians are not willing to pay the costs." The protests were similar to the civil unrest in France in May 1968, said Saeed Layalz, a reformist analyst. This "will not lead to overthrowing of the political establishment but can lead to deep developments", he said. "It's mainly the youth in the protests, who are mostly single and have no leader and they don't have a clear demand."

Tehran's number one priority will be regime self-protection

General Kenneth McKenzie Jr, the former commander of US Central Command, warns that "we just need to be very open-eyed and very realistic about what the Iranian regime will do because their number one priority will be regime self-protection." Iranian regime will go as far as imposing "genocidal measures" against its own people to protect itself. They "ll do that without blinking an eye," McKenzie said. Mohammed Alyahya, fellow at Harvard's Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs and a senior non-resident fellow at the Hudson Institute, is not of the opinion that there are cracks within the regime in Tehran because of protests across the country. "The idea that there is a reformist wing and a hardline wing in the Iranian government and

that by crafty policy making one can manipulate the situation in order to create or to bring about a safer or a less hostile Iran is a problematic idea".

Cautious analysts, however, agree that the protests serve as a warning to hardliners who are preparing the country for the eventual successor of Iran's 83-year-old supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. "The students protests will help make the system more cautious in its future decisions such as the succession," said Abdollah Momeni, a former student leader who spent five years in jail for holding "illegal" gatherings after the disputed 2009 elections. "Even if the Islamic republic survives, this new movement will have its achievements and we shall see its impacts on people's lifestyle, women's clothing and the future leadership", said Momeni.