



By: TA | AP Insight

Trump and top Iranian officials exchange threats over protests roiling Iran



U.S. President Donald Trump and top Iranian officials exchanged dueling threats Friday as **widening protests** swept across parts of the Islamic Republic, further escalating tensions between the countries after **America bombed** Iranian nuclear sites in June.

At least seven people have been **killed** so far in violence surrounding the demonstrations, which were sparked in part by the collapse of Iran's rial currency but have increasingly seen crowds chanting anti-government slogans.

The protests, now in their sixth day, have become the biggest in Iran since 2022, when the death of 22-year-old **Mahsa Amini** in police custody triggered nationwide demonstrations.

However, the demonstrations have yet to be countrywide and have not been as intense as those surrounding the death of Amini, who was detained over not wearing her hijab, or headscarf, to the liking of authorities.

Trump post sparks quick Iranian response

Trump initially wrote on his Truth Social platform, warning Iran that if it "violently kills peaceful protesters," the United States "will come to their rescue."

"We are locked and loaded and ready to go," Trump wrote, without elaborating.

Shortly after, Ali Larijani, a former parliament speaker who serves as the secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council, alleged on the social platform X that Israel and the U.S. were stoking the demonstrations.

He offered no evidence to support the allegation, which Iranian officials have repeatedly made during years of protests sweeping the country.

"Trump should know that intervention by the U.S. in the domestic problem corresponds to chaos in the entire region and the destruction of the U.S. interests," Larijani wrote on X,

which the Iranian government blocks. "The people of the U.S. should know that Trump began the adventurism. They should take care of their own soldiers."

Larijani's remarks likely referenced America's wide military footprint in the region.

Iran in June attacked Al Udeid Air **Base in Qatar** after the U.S. strikes on three nuclear sites during Israel's 12-day war on the Islamic Republic. No one was injured though a missile did hit a radome there.

Ali Shamkhani, an adviser to Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei who previously was the council's secretary for years, separately warned that "any interventionist hand that gets too close to the security of Iran will be cut."

"The people of Iran properly know the experience of 'being rescued' by Americans: from Iraq and Afghanistan to Gaza," he added on X.

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Iran's hard-liner parliament speaker Mohammad Bagher Qalibaf also threatened that all American bases and forces would be "legitimate targets."

Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesperson Esmail Baghaei also responded, citing a list of Tehran's longtime grievances against the U.S., including a CIA-backed **coup in 1953**, the downing of a **passenger jet** in 1988 and taking part in the June war.

The Iranian response came as the protests shake what has been a common refrain from officials in the theocracy — that the country broadly backed its government after the war.

Trump's online message marked a direct sign of support for the demonstrators, something

that other American presidents have avoided out of concern that activists would be accused of working with the West.

During Iran's 2009 **Green Movement** demonstrations, President Barack Obama held back from publicly backing the protests — something he said in 2022 "was a mistake."

But such White House support still carries a risk.

"Though the grievances that fuel these and past protests are due to the Iranian government's own policies, they are likely to use President Trump's statement as proof that the unrest is driven by external actors," said Naysan Rafati, an analyst at the International Crisis Group.

"But using that as a justification to crack down more violently risks inviting the very U.S. involvement Trump has hinted at," he added.

Protests continue Friday

Demonstrators took to the streets Friday in Zahedan in Iran's restive Sistan and Baluchestan province on the border with Pakistan.

The burials of several demonstrators killed in the protests also took place, sparking marches.

Online video purported to show mourners chasing off security force members who attended the funeral of 21-year-old Amirhessam Khodayari. He was killed Wednesday in Kouhdasht, over 400 kilometers (250 miles) southwest of Tehran in Iran's Lorestan province.



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Video also showed Khodayari's father denying his son served in the all-volunteer Basij force of Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard, as authorities claimed.

The semiofficial Fars news agency later reported that there were now questions about the government's claims that he served.

Iran's civilian government under reformist President Masoud Pezeshkian has been trying to signal it wants to negotiate with protesters.

However, Pezeshkian has acknowledged there is not much he can do as Iran's rial has rapidly depreciated, with \$1 now costing some 1.4 million rials. That sparked the initial protests.

The protests, taking root in economic issues, have heard demonstrators chant against Iran's theocracy as well. Tehran has had little luck in propping up its **economy** in the months since the June war.

Iran recently said it was no longer enriching uranium at any site in the country, trying to signal to the West that it remains open to potential negotiations over its atomic program to ease sanctions.

However, those talks have yet to happen as Trump and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu have warned Tehran against reconstituting its atomic program.