

SUPPLEMENTAL INTELLIGENCE REPORT

Iran War Companion Series · SUPINTEL-2026-001



SUBJECT	Iranian Domestic Unrest — Pre-War Baseline, Current State, and Foreign Involvement in Civilian Actions
REPORTING PERIOD	As of 20 MAY 2026, 2359Z (companion to DTR_20MAY2026)
PRODUCT TYPE	Supplemental Intelligence Report (SUPINTEL) — standalone companion to the Daily Threat Report. Less formal than a DTR; built for fast practitioner read.
HANDLING	FFTP OPEN · Built entirely from open-source reporting · Free to share with attribution
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HOW TO READ THIS REPORT — A NOTE ON CONFIDENCE

This is an open-source synthesis, not a verified ground-truth account. Confidence is built into the report rather than tucked into a footnote. Every Key Judgment carries an explicit confidence level, every section opens with a confidence tag, and contested figures are flagged inline at the point they appear.

Three limits shape everything below: (1) Iran imposed a near-total internet and telecommunications blackout on 8 January 2026 — every claim about events inside Iran after that date is degraded-confidence. (2) Casualty figures are wildly contested and none are independently verified. (3) Sourcing spans Western, regional (Gulf, Turkish), and Iranian state and opposition outlets — each carries a directional lean, named where it matters.

Estimative language follows ICD 203. "Likely" and "probably" indicate roughly 55–80%; "roughly even chance" 45–55%; "unlikely" 20–45%. Confidence (high / moderate / low) describes the quality of the underlying sourcing, separately from the probability of the judgment itself.

Bottom Line Up Front

Iran entered its 2026 war already in the middle of the largest anti-government uprising since the 1979 revolution. The war did not resolve that unrest — it froze it. A lethal crackdown, an internet blackout, a rally-around-the-flag effect, and a hardened post-Khamenei leadership have driven visible protest off the streets, but the economic grievances that started it remain unaddressed. The widely shared expert read is that this is a forced quiet, not a settled one.

Key Judgments

KJ-1 [HIGH CONFIDENCE] The pre-war uprising was real, nationwide, and explicitly anti-regime. Protests beginning 28 December 2025 spread to all 31 provinces and moved from economic grievance to open calls for the fall of the Islamic Republic. This is corroborated across independent government, academic, and wire sources.

KJ-2 [HIGH CONFIDENCE] The state response was a lethal crackdown paired with an information blackout. Live fire, mass arrests, and a near-total internet shutdown from 8 January are documented by the UN fact-finding

mission and multiple wire services. The crackdown's effectiveness at suppressing visible protest is not in dispute.

KJ-3 [MODERATE CONFIDENCE] Domestic protest is currently suppressed but not resolved. As of May 2026 open street protest inside Iran is largely absent and Tehran is heavily militarized. This judgment is moderate, not high, because the blackout means we are reading a quiet we cannot fully see inside.

KJ-4 [MODERATE CONFIDENCE] Foreign Shia militias materially assisted the crackdown. The involvement of Iraqi PMF factions and Afghan/Pakistani brigades in suppressing protesters is reported by CNN and corroborated by multiple outlets. Confidence is moderate on the fact of involvement; specific troop numbers and unit attributions are low confidence.

KJ-5 [MODERATE CONFIDENCE] Western governments backed the protesters rhetorically and through sanctions, not operationally. The US, UK, and others issued statements, threats, and sanctions; there is no credible open-source evidence of Western operational direction of the protests. Iran's "foreign-instigated" claims are assertion, not demonstrated fact.

KJ-6 [LOW CONFIDENCE] Renewed and possibly bloodier unrest is likely once the war settles. This is the consensus analytic read of named regional experts, but it is a forward-looking probability call resting on assumptions about Iran's economy and leadership behavior — hence low confidence, and the reason Section 7 carries four alternative outcomes.

2. The Starting Point — Iran Was Already in Revolt

CONFIDENCE: HIGH — Corroborated across UK Commons Library, UN OHCHR, Britannica, Stimson, and wire services.

The war that began with the 28 February 2026 Israeli–US strikes did not land on a calm country. It landed on one that had spent two months in open revolt against its own government.

Where it came from

The trigger was economic. Through 2025 the Iranian rial collapsed, inflation ran above 40%, and by late December the currency had fallen to roughly 1.4 million rials to the dollar. The unrest began, tellingly, in Tehran’s Grand Bazaar — the most conservative, traditionally pro-system commercial sector, and the first time since 1979 the Bazaar acted as the catalyst for nationwide protest rather than a brake on it.

It did not stay economic. What began as anger over prices and the currency escalated within days into explicit demands for the ouster of Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei and, among some factions, the end of the Islamic Republic itself. Water and energy shortages, internet censorship, mandatory hijab enforcement, and ethnic-minority grievances all fed in. By the second week the protests had reached all 31 provinces — monitors counted hundreds of locations across more than 200 cities.

How the state responded

The government ordered broad closures across 21 of 31 provinces on 31 December and shifted from an initially conciliatory tone to force. The decisive break came around 8 January: a near-total internet and telecommunications shutdown, followed by the most violent phase of the crackdown. The UN Human Rights Council’s independent fact-finding mission described it as what appeared to be the deadliest crackdown against Iran’s people since the 1979 revolution — documenting disproportionate use of force, arbitrary killings, torture, sexual violence, and forced confessions.

THE CASUALTY NUMBERS — WHY THIS REPORT WON’T GIVE YOU ONE FIGURE [LOW CONFIDENCE]

Casualty estimates for the January crackdown are irreconcilable, and the blackout is the reason. Treat all of the following as contested:

- **Iran’s government:** roughly 3,000–3,100 deaths, including security personnel.
- **UN fact-finding mission:** cited 3,000+ reported, explicitly stated it could not verify figures.
- **Activist / rights-group estimates:** from ~7,000 confirmed up to tens of thousands; some informant accounts relayed via CBS put it at 12,000–20,000.
- **Extreme outliers:** figures as high as 30,000+ have circulated. These rest on single internal-source claims and should be treated with strong skepticism.

FFTP assessment: the death toll is high and the crackdown was severe — that much is solid. Any precise number is not. Anyone citing one with confidence is overreaching the available evidence.

KEY SOURCES: see Sources list, items 1, 2, 3, 5, 6

3. What the War Itself Changed

CONFIDENCE: MODERATE — *Direction of effect is well-supported; internal detail is blackout-degraded.*

A key distinction often lost in coverage: the protests triggered BY the war were not anti-regime. When the strikes hit on 28 February and killed Khamenei, the visible domestic response was pro-government — mourning rallies in Tehran and other cities, crowds denouncing the US and Israel. The large anti-war demonstrations were mostly an international phenomenon, held in Western and Middle Eastern cities, not inside Iran.

Two forces worked together to push the anti-regime movement off the streets. The first was a rally-around-the-flag effect — an external attack that briefly made open opposition look like disloyalty. The second was the crackdown machinery itself, now operating under wartime justification: mass street deployments, checkpoints reportedly staffed even by children, arrests, and executions. By the time the war was a month old, there was little visible sign of Iranians defying the warnings not to protest.

A harder leadership now sits on top of it

Khamenei's death did not produce a softer Iran. A successor — Mojtaba Khamenei — has been installed, and the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps has risen further in influence. Human-rights observers and regional analysts describe the current leadership as more hardline than the one it replaced, with no observed gestures toward reconciliation. This is the single most important political fact for anyone forecasting Iran's domestic trajectory.

The current picture — May 2026

- **Open street protest inside Iran is largely absent.** The crackdown, the blackout, and wartime conditions have suppressed visible mobilization.
- **Tehran is heavily militarized.** Citizen accounts from May describe armored vehicles near sensitive sites, blocked routes to government centers, and patrols at major intersections — one likened the capital to a military garrison. Note: this is single-source citizen reporting, moderate confidence.
- **Arrests and executions continue at scale.** Iran's police commander stated on 18 May that more than 6,500 people had been detained on espionage, collaboration, or anti-government grounds since the conflict began, with 567 cases tied to opposition groups. Executions surged through early 2026.
- **The visible "protest" activity now is mostly diaspora.** Rallies through mid-May 2026 in Stockholm, Hamburg, Aarhus, Gothenburg and elsewhere protested executions and political imprisonment. These are organized abroad — and largely by opposition-aligned groups whose framing should be weighed accordingly (see Section 5).

KEY SOURCES: *see Sources list, items 1, 8, 9, 10, 11, 15*

4. Foreign Government Involvement in Civilian Actions

CONFIDENCE: MODERATE — Moderate on the fact of involvement; LOW on specific numbers and unit attributions.

This was a specific question, and it has two very different halves: foreign forces helping the regime CRUSH civilians, and foreign governments backing the PROTESTERS. The evidence is much stronger for the first than commonly assumed, and much weaker for the second than Tehran claims.

4A. Foreign militias helping suppress protesters — the stronger evidence

Multiple outlets reported that Iran imported Iran-aligned foreign Shia militias to help put down the protests — fighters with no local allegiance, used in past Iranian crackdowns precisely because they have fewer reservations about firing on Iranian civilians. CNN reported in mid-January, citing a European military source and an Iraqi security source, that Iraqi militiamen had crossed into Iran to assist. The groups named across reporting include the Iraqi Popular Mobilization Forces (factions such as Kata'ib Hezbollah, Harakat al-Nujaba, Badr), the Afghan Liwa Fatemiyoun, the Pakistani Liwa Zainabiyoun, and Lebanese Hezbollah.

CONFIDENCE BREAKDOWN — FOREIGN MILITIA INVOLVEMENT

The fact of involvement — MODERATE-TO-HIGH. Consistent with a documented Iranian pattern stretching back through 2019 and 2022, reported by CNN and corroborated by multiple outlets, and openly warned against by the US on 9 January.

The specific numbers — LOW. The widely cited "~5,000 Iraqi fighters" traces to a single Iraqi security source. Unit-by-unit attributions of who did the killing rely partly on social-media accounts and cannot be independently verified under the blackout.

Bottom line: treat foreign-militia participation as a real and well-patterned feature of the crackdown — but treat any precise headcount as an estimate, not a fact.

4B. Foreign governments backing the protesters — rhetoric and sanctions, not operations

Western involvement on the protester side is real but stops well short of operational support. The US issued repeated public warnings and threats — President Trump's January statement that the US was "locked and loaded" to "come to their rescue" if peaceful protesters were killed — and the US announced sanctions on Iranian security officials on 15 and 23 January. The UK condemned the violence and announced new sanctions; UK political figures openly debated supporting regime change as part of a coalition. China, by contrast, opposed outside intervention.

What is absent from the open-source record is any credible evidence of Western governments operationally organizing, directing, or arming the protests. Iran's government has consistently blamed Israel and the US for instigating the unrest and framed it as foreign-coordinated — but those are assertions offered as justification for the crackdown, not demonstrated facts. The diaspora mobilizations were large and well-organized, but "organized by exiles abroad" is not the same as "directed by foreign governments." Both Iran's instigation narrative and any claim of covert Western orchestration should be treated as unproven.

Actor	What the evidence shows	Confidence
Iraqi PMF / Afghan / Pakistani / Hezbollah militias	Reported deployment inside Iran to help suppress protesters; fits long-standing pattern.	Involvement: MODERATE-HIGH. Numbers: LOW.

United States	Public threats, "rescue" rhetoric, sanctions on security officials. No evidence of operational direction.	Rhetoric/sanctions: HIGH. Operational role: not evidenced.
United Kingdom / European states	Condemnation, sanctions, political debate over regime change. No operational role evidenced.	Rhetoric/sanctions: HIGH. Operational role: not evidenced.
Iran's "foreign instigation" claim	Tehran blames Israel/US for coordinating the unrest. Offered as crackdown justification.	Assertion, not demonstrated. LOW.

KEY SOURCES: *see Sources list, items 1, 4, 7, 12, 13, 14, 16*

5. Regional Perspectives — and Their Biases

CONFIDENCE: MODERATE — *Each regional source carries a known directional lean; biases are named so the reader can discount them.*

How Iran's unrest is read depends heavily on who is doing the reading. The earlier sections lean on Western, UN, and Israeli-adjacent sourcing — a real limitation. This section deliberately widens the aperture to regional voices, and flags each one's lean rather than presenting any as neutral.

5A. Turkey — stability over freedom

Ankara's posture is the clearest case of a regional government siding with regime stability. Turkish officials have acknowledged the protests are rooted in genuine domestic grievances, but consistently warned against "external exploitation" of the unrest — effectively echoing Tehran's foreign-instigation narrative. President Erdogan framed the protests as a "test" of Iran's social peace and reportedly congratulated Iran's president on his handling of the unrest; senior figures drew parallels to Turkey's own 2013 Gezi protests as "foreign provocations." The driver is interest, not principle: Turkey fears refugee flows, spillover instability, and the loss of roughly \$10 billion in bilateral trade and a gas-supply relationship. Turkey has also opposed US sanctions on Iran.

Source-bias note: Turkish state and pro-government media (e.g. Anadolu, TRT) reflect this stability-first line and tend to underweight the crackdown's severity. Conversely, the sharpest characterizations of Turkey's stance come from Israeli-aligned institutes (FDD, INSS) and the opposition outlet Iran International, all of which have their own reasons to portray Ankara as a regime shield. The reader should treat both the Turkish framing and its harshest critics as interested parties.

5B. Arab Gulf states — fear of chaos, not love of the regime

Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Qatar occupy a more complicated middle. They are long-standing strategic rivals of Tehran with no sympathy for the Islamic Republic — yet they pressed Washington to refrain from striking Iran, fearing a collapse that plunges the region into chaos far more than they fear a weakened-but-intact Iran. After the war began, Saudi Arabia condemned Iranian attacks on Gulf states "in the strongest terms," while Gulf and other regional foreign ministries also stressed that the conflict began with the US-Israeli strikes. Oman and Qatar played active de-escalation and mediation roles. The DTR cycle independently shows this same Gulf-monarchy mediation track around the deal-or-strike window.

Source-bias note: Gulf state-influenced media (Al Arabiya, The National, and Qatar-funded Al Jazeera) are professionally produced and often the best regional reporting available, but each reflects its government's foreign-policy posture — Al Jazeera in particular is editorially independent in form but Qatar-funded, and its

framing of Iran differs markedly from Saudi/UAE outlets. Gulf coverage tends to foreground regional-stability and inter-state dimensions over the protesters' domestic demands.

5C. Iranian state media — the regime's own account

Iranian state and semi-official outlets (IRNA, IRIB, Press TV, Tasnim, Fars) are included here as the regime's position, not as independent reporting. Their account: the unrest was a foreign-backed plot, security forces showed restraint against "rioters," and casualties were limited — Tasnim reported 109 security personnel killed and authorities put total deaths around 3,000–3,100. Iran's foreign minister argued the protests were deliberately made "bloody" to manufacture a pretext for US intervention.

Source-bias note: this is testimony from a party to the matter. It is useful for understanding the regime's self-justification and for official figures it is willing to state on the record — and those figures are themselves a flagged low-end bound on casualties. It should never be treated as a neutral source, and its foreign-instigation claim remains assertion, not demonstrated fact.

5D. What the regional split tells us

Strip away the framing and a consistent pattern emerges: no major regional government actually wants the Islamic Republic to fall right now. Turkey wants stability, the Gulf wants no chaos, and even adversaries prefer a contained Iran to an uncontrolled collapse. This regional preference for managed continuity is itself an analytic data point — it means external regional pressure cuts toward dampening the unrest, not amplifying it, which feeds directly into the alternative outcomes in Section 7.

KEY SOURCES: *see Sources list, items 17–23 (and items 1, 7, 12 for cross-region context)*

6. Source Reliability

CONFIDENCE: HIGH — *This appraisal is FFTP's own and is offered transparently so readers can re-weigh as they wish.*

Grading adapts the Admiralty / NATO system: source reliability A (reliable) to F (cannot judge); information credibility 1 (confirmed) to 6 (cannot judge). The single most important caveat: the 8 January internet blackout degrades every source's ability to report on events inside Iran after that date.

Source	Grade	How to weigh it
UK House of Commons Library; UN OHCHR fact-finding mission; US Congressional Research Service	A-2	Independent, non-partisan, methodologically careful. The strongest material here. Still constrained by the blackout on internal detail.
Wire services — Reuters, CNN, NBC, ABC; Britannica; Stimson Center	B-2	Credible, professionally edited. On-the-ground claims often depend on informants and a European/Iraqi security source — reliable outlets, but the underlying sourcing is thin and singular in places.
NetBlocks (connectivity monitoring)	B-2	Reliable for the technical fact of the blackout. Does not speak to casualties or protest scale.
GlobalSecurity.org; Museum of Global Protest; aggregators	C-3	Useful for synthesis and scale estimates; mixed primary sourcing. Cross-check before relying on any single figure.
Al Jazeera (Qatar-funded)	B-2	Professionally produced, often the best regional reporting. Editorially independent in form but Qatar-funded; framing of Iran differs from Saudi/UAE outlets. A regional, not neutral, lens.
Gulf-state-aligned media (Al Arabiya, The National) and Gulf FM statements	C-3	Reflect their governments' foreign-policy postures. Useful for the regional/inter-state dimension; tend to underweight protesters' domestic demands.
Turkish state / pro-government media (Anadolu, TRT)	C-4	Reflect Ankara's stability-first line; tend to echo the "foreign exploitation" framing and underweight crackdown severity. Read as a government-aligned perspective.
Iranian state / semi-official media (IRNA, IRIB, Press TV, Tasnim, Fars)	E-5	The regime's own account — a party to the matter. Useful for official figures and self-justification; never a neutral source. Foreign-instigation claim is assertion, not fact.
NCRI / PMOI-MEK; FDD; INSS; Iran International	D-4	Opposition-aligned or Israeli-adjacent advocacy outlets. Often factually first on rallies, detentions, and regional analysis, but framing is advocacy. Use for leads; not neutral assessment.
Social-media accounts; anonymous informants	F-5	The origin of the most extreme casualty and unit-attribution claims. Possibly true, unverifiable. Flagged inline wherever relied upon.

7. Alternative Outcomes — What Could Happen Next

CONFIDENCE: LOW — *Forward-looking. These are structured estimates, not predictions; probability bands are deliberately wide.*

KJ-6 — that unrest resumes once the war settles — is the consensus read, but a single line would overstate it. Four outcomes are live. Probabilities are FFTP estimates and sum to ~100% as a forecasting discipline, not a claim of precision.

A NOTE ON SOURCE BIAS IN THESE ESTIMATES

These probability bands are shaped by who is doing the reporting, and the reader should know which way each source pushes:

- **Western, UN, and opposition-aligned sources** (the bulk of the record) tend to emphasize regime fragility and the protesters' cause — which pulls toward Outcomes 1 and 3.
- **Turkish and Iranian state sources** emphasize regime resilience and "foreign-instigated" unrest — which pulls toward Outcome 2.
- **Gulf-state sources** emphasize stability and managed continuity — also weighting against a near-term collapse.

FFTP read: the "frozen, not resolved" estimate (Outcome 1) survives this cross-check because it does not depend on either camp being right — it holds whether the regime looks strong or weak today, since it turns on the unaddressed economy. Outcomes 2 and 3 are where the source lean matters most, and their wide bands reflect exactly that uncertainty.

1. Frozen, not resolved — most likely, ~55–65%

The crackdown has suppressed visible protest but solved none of the economic drivers. Unrest resumes when the war ends, the economy worsens, or both. This is the mainstream expert read.

Watch for / would change this view: A genuine economic stabilization package; sustained, credible regime concessions; a real easing of repression.

2. Durable rally-around-the-flag — unlikely, ~15–25%

The external attack authentically rebuilds regime legitimacy; the pre-war coalition fragments and the moment passes. Historically rally effects fade as economic pain returns.

Watch for / would change this view: Protest activity falling away in previously mobilized constituencies; bazaar-sector reconciliation with the state; durable nationalist cohesion months after the war.

3. Slow fragmentation already underway — unlikely, ~10–20%

Security-force fatigue, localized loss of control, or quiet elite defection is happening beneath the blackout and simply is not visible yet.

Watch for / would change this view: Reporting of security-force defections or refusals; protest in regime-loyal areas; loss of state control in specific cities or provinces.

4. Catastrophic-toll deterrence — low confidence on magnitude

The January crackdown killed far more than acknowledged, structurally deterring near-term protest through sheer fear. Plausible in direction; the magnitude rests on unverifiable informant claims.

Watch for / would change this view: Verified casualty data once communications fully reopen; independent forensic or medical-record corroboration.

KEY SOURCES: see Sources list, items all sections; alternatives draw on items 1–6, 8–11, 17–23, and FFTP analysis

8. Intelligence Gaps

CONFIDENCE: HIGH — *These gaps are stated plainly so the report is not read as more complete than it is.*

- **Verified casualty data.** No independently verified death toll exists for the January crackdown. The 12,000–20,000 range is informant-sourced; higher figures are outliers.
- **Real-time internal conditions.** The blackout means current protest intensity, security-force morale, and elite cohesion inside Iran are largely unobservable.
- **Foreign-militia specifics.** Troop numbers and which units conducted which actions are not verifiable; the fact of involvement is better supported than the detail.
- **Substance of any US–Iran deal.** Whether a negotiated settlement includes provisions affecting domestic governance or detainees is not public.
- **Succession stability.** How consolidated Mojtaba Khamenei’s position actually is, and how the IRGC’s ascendancy plays out internally, remains opaque.

Note for the DTR cycle

DTR v5.54 covers the war’s diplomatic and military track in depth but carries domestic unrest only as a single oblique reference to post-Khamenei political costs. Regime stability is a genuine second-order driver of the war’s trajectory — it shapes Tehran’s negotiating incentives and post-conflict continuity risk. Consider a standing indicator line for domestic-stability signals so this variable is tracked rather than assumed.

Sources

All sourcing is open. Links were live at time of writing. The list spans Western, UN, regional (Arab Gulf, Turkish), and Iranian state and opposition outlets — deliberately, so the report is not read through a single lens. Weigh each against the Section 6 reliability grades: regional and state outlets are included for the perspective they add, with their directional lean named, not because any is neutral.

1. [UK House of Commons Library — Iran protests 2026: UK and international response](#)
2. [UK House of Commons Library — Iran: What challenges face the country in 2026?](#)
3. [UN OHCHR — Human Rights Council resolution and fact-finding mission on Iran](#)
4. [US Congressional Research Service — Protests in Iran: Possible U.S. Responses](#)
5. [Britannica — 2026 Iranian Protests](#)
6. [Stimson Center — Why the Latest Iran Protests Started in the Tehran Bazaar](#)
7. [Council on Foreign Relations — Unpacking Iran’s Protests and Trump’s Threats](#)
8. [NBC News — Iran steps up executions and internal crackdown as war drags on](#)
9. [ABC News — Iran escalates crackdown on dissent as arrests and executions surge](#)
10. [Reuters \(via AOL\) — Fearing economic collapse after war, Iran cracks down on dissent](#)
11. [Euronews — Tehran accelerates executions of political prisoners since start of Iran war](#)
12. [The Jerusalem Post — Are Iraqi militias and Afghan fighters suppressing protests in Iran?](#)
13. [Wikipedia — Involvement of foreign militias in the suppression of protests in Iran](#)
14. [Museum of Protest — How the Iranian Diaspora Coordinated Protests Across 3 Continents](#)
15. [NCRI — Iran News in Brief \(May 2026 editions\) \[opposition-aligned; see Section 6 reliability matrix\]](#)
16. [GlobalSecurity.org — Iranian Protests 2025-2026 / Regime Change 2026 scenarios](#)

17. [Al Jazeera — World reacts to Iran protests and US military threats \[Qatar-funded; regional lens\]](#)
 18. [Al Jazeera — World reacts to US, Israel attack on Iran \(Gulf state reactions, Oman/Qatar mediation\)](#)
 19. [Al Jazeera — "Change is inevitable": What is next for Iran? \(Gulf Arab pressure on Washington\)](#)
 20. [Middle East Eye — How Turkey sees the protests in Iran](#)
 21. [INSS — Iran's Stability as a Turkish National Security Interest \[Israeli institute; see Section 6\]](#)
 22. [Council on Foreign Relations — What Iran's Protests Mean for Countries in the Middle East](#)
 23. [Wikipedia — Reactions to the 2025–2026 Iranian protests \(incl. Iranian state-media positions\)](#)
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