

**“HEADING FOR A REVOLUTION IN IRAN?”
A CONVERSATION WITH MASIH ALINEJAD
[IRANIAN ACTIVIST AND JOURNALIST]**



SUMMARY OF A ‘MIDDLE EAST INSTITUTE’ WEBINAR



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INTRODUCTION

In the course of the past 3 weeks, tens of thousands of people have participated in unprecedented protests against the Iranian regime, spurred by the killing at the hands of the country’s ‘Morality Police’ of a 22-year-old woman, Mahsa Amini.

The result has been the largest and most widespread wave of demonstrations since the inception of the Islamic Republic, and especially since the “Green Revolution’ more than a decade ago (2009).

In a webinar sponsored by the Middle East Institute, factors around the current demonstrations and the possibilities for the start of an even greater movement leading potentially to regime change were discussed by the journalist and women’s rights activist Masih Alinejad in conversation with the MEI's Nazee Moinian, herself, an Iran foreign policy expert.

KEY POINTS MADE BY ALINEJAD

- Women, though confronted with extreme brutality, are leading the revolution against the Mullahs.
- In the aftermath of the brutal death of Mahsa Amini, the world is finally paying attention to what is really going on in Iran.
- The scarf that is now being openly burned by thousands of women is the most visible symbol of oppression on the part of the Islamic Republic.
- What Iranian women want is nothing less than regime change.
- The 3 pillars (by extension) on which the Islamic Republic currently stands are the following:
 - 1. Death to America
 - 2. Death to Israel
 - 3. Compulsory ‘Hejab’
- Without question, the weakest of the pillar is the imposition of Hejab .
- Resisting Hejab in symbolic terms resembles the fall of the Berlin Wall. Just as the fall of the Berlin marked the beginning of the end for Communism, universal actions against the Hejab in Iran could be the beginning of the end for the fundamentalist Islamic dictatorship in Iran.

- Having met with the US President's National Security Adviser on three occasions and other personalities associated with the Democratic administrations of President Obama and Biden (e.g., Hillary Clinton) , the excuse offered for not having reached out or reacted to popular feelings on the ground in Iran has been "wrong advice".
- While the slogan 'Death to America' has not even once been mentioned in any of the recent protests, it is interesting that the 'Left in the US' criticises countries like Saudi Arabia but says nothing against Iran!
- Key points discussed with Jake Sullivan, Biden's National Security Adviser, have covered the following areas:
 - It was underlined that the Islamic regime cannot be reformed.
 - People like Putin, Madero and Khamenei are united in purpose and help each other to suppress their own people.
 - Thus, it is imperative that the democracies should do the same. They can for example, recall their Ambassadors and not enter into new deals with the Deep State or to release billions of dollars to them. Indeed, if the regime was to fall, then there would be no need for a new JCPOA!
 - The only positive outcome from these talks was that the US would try to help provide Iran with better internet facilities.
- The underlying reason for the wrong advice offered to US officials has been the presence of a group of American-Iranians lobbyists for the Islamic Republic in the Washington (according to whom, Hejab is not considered as a big deal!).
- Also, there is a great deal of hypocrisy in the US when it comes to big tech, for example, not closing the twitter accounts of Khamenei and his cohorts (especially when they had moved to close the account of Donald Trump) or for not showing the kind of reaction towards the death of Mahsa Amini which they displayed in the case of George Floyd.
- There is no way that Khamenei's calls against the likes of Israel or people like Salman Rushdie is in any way or shape less toxic than anything previously uttered by Trump.
- It is a fact that following the death of George Floyd, people in the US took to the streets. However, it was never highlighted that in Iran following the death of Mahsa Amini, Khamenei does not allow anyone to protest in the streets.
- Another sign of US/Western hypocrisy is not only the absence of figures such as Michelle Obama or Oprah Winfrey to speak up for the likes of Mahsa Amini but also the ongoing rumours that the West might release sanctioned funds that could help the repressive regime in Iran.
- Today, Iranian women and students are getting a great deal of solidarity around the world.

- However, this level of solidarity is not enough. People and government officials should not cut their hair but their ties with the Islamic Republic.
- While support from civil society in France, Germany and the UK has been good, the behaviour of certain leaders, especially President Macron of France has been appalling.
- For its part, the US can get rid of the Iranian interest section in Washington which has no business being there.
- The protests have not had any exact leader, given that so far they have all been leading the movement together.
- But for the protests to continue, outside help is needed, given that 'WE' (i.e., Iranians both inside and outside Iran, the Middle East and the West etc,) share a common enemy.
- It is important to note that in the past, the benefits of the JCPOA did not go to the people of Iran. Instead, amidst all existing sanction, it went to 51 religious institutions whose budgets were increased or for such action as building a hospital in Venezuela (something that had been announced by former IRI Foreign Minister, Javad Zarif).
- For any post-regime scenario, it is worth noting that there are so many smart Iranians who can fill the gaps having been deliberately side-lined from public life by the IRI.
- What all Iranians want is a secular democracy in which religion has been privatized.

