An interview with a member of Decolonize Anarchism on the current situation in Iran

An interview by the Instituto de Estudos Libertários (Brazil) with an Iranian member of Decolonize Anarchism on the current situation in Iran

Decolonize Anarchism

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This interview was conducted and translated into Portuguese by Cassio Brancaleone for the IEL. The interview in Portuguese can be found on the IEL website at: ielibertarios.wordpress.com

Opening remarks by the comrade: I send my warmest greetings to comrades in IEL. At a moment when war, repression, and authoritarianism shape so much of the world, transnational solidarity between movements becomes more important than ever. Our struggles are interconnected, and the fight for freedom in one place is inseparable from the struggles of people elsewhere. We look forward to strengthening these ties of solidarity and continuing the shared work of building a world beyond domination and exploitation.

Q1. Contemporary Origins of the Crisis

From your perspective, what are the main contemporary roots of the current crisis in Iran? How do economic deterioration, political repression, and the legacy of previous protest cycles (such as those in recent years) converge in the present moment?

A1. From my perspective, the current crisis in Iran is the result of a long accumulation of authoritarian state power, neoliberal dispossession, imperial pressure, and the unresolved legacy of successive uprisings. What we are seeing now is a convergence of economic breakdown and political illegitimacy. The latest protest wave did not appear out of nowhere; it was at least the fifth major movement in a decade, and it emerged from years of labor struggle, feminist revolt, and popular experience with the state's inability to provide even the minimum conditions of social reproduction.

Economically, the crisis is a crisis of everyday life. The immediate trigger of the 2025–26 uprising was the collapse of the rial, soaring inflation, and the deepening inability of ordinary people to afford food, medicine, housing, and transport. The rial lost nearly half its value in 2025. That means social ruin for workers, pensioners, teachers, truck drivers, petty traders, and the urban poor. This is not simply "mismanagement," though mismanagement is real; it is the outcome of a political economy in which sanctions, militarization, corruption, privatization, and oligarchic extraction are all offloaded onto society. That is why economic deterioration so quickly becomes political. In Iran, people do not experience inflation separately from the state. They experience

it through the regime's visible priorities: repression over welfare, security institutions over social provision, regional power projection over dignified life at home. The latest protests began around livelihood demands and bazaar strikes, then rapidly escalated into direct denunciations of clerical rule.

Political repression is the other half of the crisis. The Islamic Republic has responded to each cycle of dissent not by resolving underlying grievances but by intensifying coercion including mass arrests, executions, internet blackouts, attacks on students, unionists, womxn, and oppressed nationalities, and the securitization of all independent collective life. During the 2025–26 protests the regime shut down the internet, raided hospitals and massacred tens of thousands of protestors in only two days. And it hasn't stopped. The regime is continuing arbitrary arrests and executions of the protesters. Repression has therefore deepened the crisis instead of containing it, because it destroys the regime's already thin claims to legitimacy while teaching new generations that no reform from above is coming.

The legacy of previous protest cycles is important here. The 2017–18 protests foregrounded economic anger and spread beyond established middle-class reformist politics. The 2019 Aban uprising showed the explosive force of revolt against austerity and fuel-price policies, as well as the state's willingness to massacre. The 2022 "Jin, Jiyan, Azadi", "Woman, Life, Freedom" uprising transformed the terrain further by centering women's liberation, Kurdish and Baloch struggles, youth defiance, and the rejection of the regime's patriarchal and colonial order. The current moment reflects not only the trauma left by repression, but also the lessons learned through struggle. Many people have developed a deep skepticism toward reformism, gained experience with decentralized organizing, built stronger ties between feminist, labor, student, and oppressed-nationality movements, and increasingly understand that the crisis is rooted in the structure of the system itself.

Labor unrest is especially important in linking these cycles together. Even before the latest uprising, Iran had seen repeated strikes and organizing among oil workers, teachers, pensioners, and truck drivers. In 2025, the truckers' strike spread to well over a hundred cities, and teachers' unions publicly backed it. These developments matter because they show that the crisis is not only expressed in street protest but also in struggles around circulation, workplaces, and the reproduction of daily life. They point toward forms of collective power that exceed electoral politics and external regime-change fantasies.

Q 2. Iran in the International System

How should we understand the crisis within the broader framework of international relations? In particular, what roles do the United States, Russia, and China play in shaping Iran's strategic position? How does Iran's place in the global economy — especially under sanctions — affect its internal political stability?

A2. The crisis in Iran has to be understood within a broader regional and global struggle over power, corridors, markets, military influence, and political order. But the Iranian question cannot and should not be reduced to geopolitics alone. None of the major states involved in this conflict represent emancipatory forces for the people of Iran. The Islamic Republic, the United States, Israel, Russia, China, and the surrounding regional states all pursue their own strategic interests within a system shaped by capital, militarization, and state competition. Iranian society is therefore trapped between internal authoritarianism and external geopolitical rivalry.

At the regional level, the Islamic Republic has spent decades building a network of influence through Hezbollah in Lebanon, allied militias in Iraq, support for the Syrian state, and relations

with Palestinian armed movements, including Hamas. The regime presents this as an "axis of resistance" against Israel and U.S. domination. The Israeli regime sees Iran's missile capacity, nuclear program, and regional alliances as a strategic and often explicitly existential threat. From the standpoint of the Israeli and U.S. security establishments, weakening this network means not only striking Iran directly, but also rolling back the regional chain that links Tehran to Baghdad, Damascus, Beirut, and Gaza. The U.S. base at al-Tanf was important for them specifically because it obstructed Iranian routes across Syria to Hezbollah in Lebanon, which shows how central Syria has been to this larger regional contest.

That is also why Syria matters so much. After Assad's fall in December 2024, Washington improved ties with the new Syrian leadership, withdrew from al-Tanf, and recalibrated its presence there after years of using the base as a counterweight to Iranian influence and weapons transfers through Syria. So the long-term U.S.-Israeli goal is not just "regime change" in a narrow sense. It is better understood as a broader attempt to reorder the region in ways that weaken Islamic Republic's ability to project force, reduce the military depth of Hezbollah and allied actors, secure Israel's regional position, and align local states more closely with a U.S.-centered security architecture. In that sense, the regional realignment can be seen as part of a wider effort to shape the emerging global order, consolidating American influence while restructuring regional security and economic systems.

Russia and China occupy a different position. Both benefit from a weaker U.S.-dominated order and both value Iran as a useful partner, but neither is committed to Iran in any unconditional sense. Russia sees Iran as part of a broader anti-Western alignment and as a regional partner, but Moscow has largely avoided direct confrontation in the current war and is balancing its Iran relationship against other priorities, including Ukraine and relations with Gulf states. China's relationship is similarly pragmatic. Beijing values Iran for energy, trade routes, and geopolitical leverage against Washington, but it has avoided binding military commitments and prioritizes flexibility. The recent U.N. vote, in which Russia and China abstained rather than vetoing a resolution condemning Iran's attacks on neighboring states, made those limits visible.

This is where a non-campist analysis is essential. Two false positions should be rejected. The first is the campist claim that Iran's crisis is basically the product of Western sanctions and pressure. That view ignores the Islamic Republic's own role in producing the crisis through repression, corruption, patriarchal domination, militarization, anti-labor policies, and the destruction of independent political life. The second is the liberal claim that sanctions are secondary, targeted, or relatively harmless. That view ignores the fact that sanctions operate as a form of economic warfare. They contribute to inflation, currency collapse, shortages, industrial breakdown, and social insecurity, and the burden falls overwhelmingly on ordinary people rather than on ruling elites. So, both things are true at once. External pressure intensifies the crisis, and the regime then redistributes the costs downward onto society.

Iran's place in the global economy reflects this contradiction. Iran is excluded from much of the U.S.-led financial order, yet still integrated into global capitalism through sanctions-evasion networks, discounted exports, intermediaries, and opaque commercial channels. That has helped generate a sanctions-driven shadow economy in which politically connected actors, security institutions, and brokers profit from scarcity and opacity. Iranian officials have acknowledged that tens of billions of dollars in export revenues did not return to the country's formal financial system. So sanctions do not simply weaken the state; they also help produce a shadow elite whose wealth depends on isolation, smuggling, and geopolitical confrontation. The result is deeper in-

ternal instability, because ordinary people absorb the costs of inflation and war while segments of the ruling bloc benefit from the very crisis that immiserates society.

So, the crisis should be understood as part of a wider struggle over the future of the region. The US and Israel are trying to reshape that order in ways that weaken Iran and secure a more favorable balance of power. Russia and China support Iran only to the extent that it serves their own strategic interests. And inside Iran, the costs of all this are paid by society. That is why the problem cannot be framed as a simple contest between blocs. From my perspective, the real divide is not between "East" and "West," but between ruling powers that seek domination and the peoples of the region who are trying to survive war, occupation, dictatorship, and economic ruin.

Q3. Characterization of the Iranian Political Regime

For a Brazilian audience unfamiliar with Iran's institutional structure, how would you characterize the current government? How does the political system function in practice — including the role of the Supreme Leader, elected institutions, and key power centers such as the Revolutionary Guards? Which political factions dominate today?

A3. The political system of the Islamic Republic is a hybrid regime that combines republican institutions (elections, parliament, presidency) with a theocratic and security-dominated power structure. In practice, the regime functions as a highly authoritarian clerical–security state in which real power is concentrated in unelected institutions. At the top of this system is the Supreme Leader, who commands the armed forces, appoints the heads of the judiciary and major state institutions, and ultimately determines the direction of domestic and foreign policy.

Elected institutions exist but operate within strict limits. Candidates must first be approved by the Guardian Council, which effectively filters out anyone considered politically unacceptable. As a result, elections take place within a very narrow political spectrum and do not allow genuine opposition to compete.

Alongside clerical authority, the regime rests heavily on security institutions, especially the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC). Over the past decades the Guards have evolved into a powerful military–economic force that plays a major role not only in regional military operations but also in key sectors of the Iranian economy. The Revolutionary Guards control large parts of the economy through construction conglomerates, energy contracts, and sanctions-evasion networks.

From my perspective, the system is a clerical fascism, combined with what many activists describe gender apartheid. The state enforces strict control over womxn's bodies and social life through discriminatory laws, compulsory hijab, morality policing, and discriminatory legal structures that limit women's rights in areas such as family law, employment, and political participation.

Labor rights also illustrate the gap between formal law and reality. While unionization is technically legal on paper, independent labor organizing is systematically repressed. Teachers, oil workers, truck drivers, and other labor activists who attempt to organize outside state-controlled unions often face arrest, long prison sentences, and intimidation. In some cases, labor activists have been prosecuted under national security charges.

More broadly, political dissent is criminalized through sweeping security laws. One of the most severe charges is "*moharebeh*", often translated as "waging war against God." This accusation has been used against protesters and political opponents and carries the possibility of

execution. Such legal tools allow the state to treat political opposition as a form of existential threat.

Iran's political system operates within a theocratic framework dominated by two loose factions—Principlists (conservatives) and Reformists—rather than structured parties. Organizations such as the Combatant Clergy Association, the Front of Islamic Revolution Stability, and various reformist coalitions represent different tendencies within the ruling establishment. However, all factions ultimately operate within the ideological boundaries set by the Supreme Leader and the clerical state, and none challenge the fundamental structure of the Islamic Republic. In recent years, especially after the suppression of mass protests and the current war, the political field has narrowed further, with hardline Principlist factions and security institutions—particularly the Revolutionary Guards—consolidating power while reformist influence has largely declined.

Q 4. Opposition Forces and Political Pluralism

How does opposition operate within and outside the country? Are there reformist currents, liberal groups, monarchists, or other tendencies that meaningfully shape the political landscape? To what extent do they have social roots or organizational capacity?

A4. Political opposition in Iran operates under extremely restrictive conditions. Inside the country, independent political organizing is effectively criminalized, and many forms of opposition activity are treated as threats to national security. As a result, opposition forces are fragmented, decentralized, and often forced to operate informally or underground.

Within the official political system, what is often described as "opposition" mainly takes the form of reformist currents. Reformists generally advocate limited political liberalization, greater civil freedoms, and improved relations with the international community, but they do not seek to dismantle the Islamic Republic itself. Over the past decade, however, especially after repeated protest cycles and the tightening of political control, reformist influence has declined significantly. Many reformist politicians have been disqualified from elections, marginalized from decision-making, or have lost credibility among large segments of society who see reform within the system as no longer possible. Their combined social base now appears relatively small, perhaps no more than 15–20% of the population.

Outside the official system, opposition exists in a variety of forms, including liberal democratic groups, leftist networks, feminist movements, student organizations, and labor activists. Much of this opposition is not organized as formal parties but rather as loosely connected social movements, especially among workers, teachers, students, and women**.**

The Iranian diaspora also includes several organized opposition tendencies. These include monarchist groups that support the restoration of the Pahlavi monarchy, as well as liberal republican organizations and various exile political groups. Monarchists have significant visibility in international media and among some segments of the diaspora, but their social roots inside Iran are difficult to measure, partly because political repression makes open support risky. In recent protest cycles there has also been a visible resurgence of monarchist sentiment, particularly around Reza Pahlavi, the son of Iran's last Shah. During the recent years and months leading up to the current war, support for Pahlavi appeared to reach its highest level in decades. At its peak, his support may have reached around 15–20%. However, following his call for nationwide protests which led to the regime's January 2026 massacre of protesters, and amid the escalation of war and the absence of clear backing from the US, enthusiasm around him appears to have declined. Even at its peak, support for Pahlavi remained far from hegemonic, and many activists,

minority movements, and left-leaning groups remain skeptical of monarchist or leader-centered solutions to Iran's political crisis.

Despite the fragmentation of opposition forces, one point appears widely shared across Iranian society today: a large majority of people want the Islamic Republic dismantled and replaced with some form of democratic system. However, decades of repression have prevented the development of durable opposition organizations inside the country. Independent parties, unions, and political movements are systematically suppressed, and many activists face prison, exile, or execution. As a result, there is currently no unified or organized opposition capable of coordinating a national political alternative. This is especially true for the left, which historically played an important role in Iranian politics but has been severely weakened by repression, exile, and internal fragmentation since the early years of the Islamic Republic. Consequently, recent uprisings have been driven largely by spontaneous, decentralized popular mobilizations, workers, women, students, and youth taking to the streets, rather than by structured political organizations.

One reason some people have gravitated toward monarchist figures in recent years is the absence of a visible, organized alternative. For some supporters, this does not necessarily reflect a strong commitment to restoring monarchy, but rather a desire for a transitional figure capable of helping dismantle the current system and opening the path toward a democratic referendum. At the same time, there have recently been renewed efforts within the Iranian diaspora to rebuild left and progressive networks, including initiatives aimed at reconnecting labor struggles, feminist movements, and democratic organizing. These efforts remain fragmented and relatively small, but they reflect an attempt to develop collective political alternatives beyond both the Islamic Republic and monarchist restoration.

It is also important to note that the Iranian diaspora is politically diverse and deeply divided, and no single tendency represents all Iranians abroad. In recent years, a small but visible segment of the diaspora, often linked to monarchist networks, has expressed support for Israel or even supported military pressure against the Islamic Republic as a way to weaken the regime. However, this group represents only one small current among many. Large parts of the Iranian diaspora, including liberals, leftists, feminists, and many ordinary migrants, oppose both the Islamic Republic and foreign military intervention, arguing that democratic change must ultimately come from within Iranian society. As a result, these pro-Israel or strongly pro-intervention voices should not be interpreted as representing the Iranian people as a whole, either inside the country or in exile. They constitute a relatively small but vocal fragment within a much broader and politically plural diaspora community.

Q 5. The Left and Anarchist Currents

Do organized left-wing, socialist, or anarchist groups currently exist inside Iran or in exile? If so, who are the main actors, and what are their positions regarding the protests, the nuclear issue, and international sanctions? Have these groups participated in or influenced the recent mobilizations?

A5. Left-wing, socialist, and anarchist traditions have a long history in Iran, but today organized left forces inside the country are extremely weak due to decades of repression. After the 1979 revolution, the Islamic Republic systematically eliminated most independent left organizations through arrests, executions, and exile. As a result, much of the Iranian left now exists in exile or in small underground networks inside the country.

Within Iran itself, left-leaning politics today appear more through social struggles than formal organizations. Labor activism, teachers' movements, student networks, feminist organizing, and

neighborhood solidarity initiatives have all played roles in recent protest cycles. However, independent organizing is heavily repressed: labor activists, student organizers, and feminist activists often face prison sentences and security charges.

In exile, several socialist and communist groups remain active, including the Worker-communist Party of Iran, the Communist Party of Iran, and other smaller Marxist and socialist networks. These groups generally support the overthrow of the Islamic Republic and the creation of a secular democratic or socialist system, while opposing foreign military intervention and sanctions that harm ordinary people.

Another opposition organization is the Mojahedin-e Khalq (MEK). The MEK originated as an Islamist-Marxist revolutionary movement before the 1979 revolution but later became an exiled opposition organization based mainly outside Iran. Although it maintains significant international lobbying networks and media presence, it has very limited social legitimacy inside Iran, in part because of its controversial history and its alliance with Saddam Hussein during the Iran-Iraq war.

Opposition movements also exist among ethnic minority regions, particularly Kurdish, Arab, and Baloch communities. Kurdish parties such as the Komala Party and the Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan (PDKI) have long histories of armed and political struggle against the Iranian state. In the southeast, Baloch groups have organized both political movements and insurgent networks, while in the southwest some Arab organizations advocate autonomy or minority rights. These movements often combine demands for ethnic rights, regional autonomy, and political freedoms with broader opposition to the Islamic Republic.

Explicitly anarchist organizations are extremely small today due to repression. However, some anarchist and libertarian socialist networks exist in exile, including the Anarchist Front (Former Anarchist Era) and informal Iranian anarchist collectives that publish texts and participate in international solidarity networks. Inside Iran, anarchist ideas circulate more as political tendencies within student, feminist, and labor activism rather than as formal organizations. Most anarchist activity today takes the form of translation projects, political education, and solidarity networks rather than formal organizations.

Despite the weakness of organized left or anarchist groups, it is important to note that many social practices within Iranian protest movements display strongly anti-authoritarian tendencies. Decades of repression have made centralized organizations extremely vulnerable, so resistance often takes decentralized and leaderless forms. This was particularly visible during the *Woman, Life, Freedom* uprising, which spread across the country without a central leadership, formal parties, or hierarchical structures.

In many cases, protests were initiated through informal neighborhood networks, spontaneous street actions, student groups, and labor circles, making the movement flexible and difficult for the regime to suppress. The lack of centralized leadership was not a weakness but an adaptation to authoritarian repression, allowing resistance to spread through everyday acts of defiance.

These tendencies are also connected to longstanding traditions of mutual aid within Iranian society. Community support practices, such as collective fundraising, neighborhood assistance, and informal solidarity networks, have deep cultural roots. During moments of crisis, these practices often expand into more structured forms of cooperation. During the current war, especially when internet shutdowns and security crackdowns disrupt communication and daily life, people have increasingly relied on neighborhood committees local *shoras* to coordinate survival and

support. These networks help distribute resources, share information, organize local protection, and support families affected by repression or economic hardship.

Q 6. Immediate Horizons and Possible Outcomes

Looking ahead, what scenarios do you consider most plausible in the short to medium term? Do you foresee reform, escalation, fragmentation, or consolidation of authoritarian rule? Normatively speaking, what outcome would you hope for — and what conditions would be necessary to avoid further militarization, repression, or catastrophic regional consequences?

A 6. In the short term, the most plausible scenario is further authoritarian consolidation under wartime conditions. The current war has given the regime exactly the kind of emergency framework it knows how to use: militarization, nationalism, censorship, arrests, internet shutdowns, and the criminalization of dissent in the name of national security.

A second plausible scenario is continued instability without immediate collapse. The regime may remain in power while becoming weaker, harsher, and more fragmented internally. Iran is under pressure from war, sanctions, economic breakdown, and a deep legitimacy crisis.

A third possibility is fragmentation from below and above at the same time. From below, society may continue to resist through strikes, local survival networks, women's defiance, and neighborhood coordination. From above, different parts of the ruling bloc—clerical institutions, the Revolutionary Guards, intelligence networks, and economic power centers—may compete over how to manage crisis and succession. But even this would not necessarily mean liberation. Fragmentation can also mean civil breakdown, militia rule, or a transition managed by another authoritarian bloc. That danger becomes even sharper in a regional war.

Another argument frequently raised by campist commentators is the warning that any revolutionary rupture in Iran would inevitably lead to civil war or the "balkanization" of the country. This narrative often portrays Kurdish movements and other oppressed nationalities as separatist threats and uses nationalist fear to discourage revolutionary change. While some geopolitical analysts have speculated that external powers might try to weaken Iran by encouraging internal fragmentation or ethnic insurgencies, the more immediate political function of this discourse is to defend the status quo by presenting authoritarian rule as the only alternative to chaos.

From an anti-authoritarian perspective, this framing is deeply misleading. The struggles of Kurds, Arabs, Baloch, Azeris, and other nationalities in Iran are rooted in long histories of repression, cultural marginalization, and economic inequality. Defending the right of self-determination for all peoples does not mean advocating the disintegration of country. It means recognizing that genuine democracy cannot exist without the freedom of oppressed communities to determine their political future. Rejecting nationalist fear-mongering is therefore essential if a democratic movement is to emerge that can build solidarity across Iran's diverse societies rather than reproducing the authoritarian logic of the state.

So, I do not see "reform" as the likeliest horizon. The reformist path has lost most of its credibility, and wartime conditions usually shrink, rather than expand, the space for internal liberalization. The more likely horizon is repression combined with prolonged crisis and uneven social resistance.

Normatively, the outcome I would hope for is neither regime survival nor foreign-managed regime change. It would be a democratic rupture from below: the dismantling of the Islamic Republic through mass popular pressure, followed by a genuinely democratic transition shaped by workers, women, oppressed nationalities, students, neighborhood committees, and grassroots

civil society, not by military intervention, monarchist restoration, or elite bargaining among outside powers. From an anti-authoritarian perspective, the goal is not simply to replace one ruling clique with another, but to open space for self-organization and popular power.

To avoid further militarization, repression, and catastrophic regional consequences, several conditions are necessary. First, the war itself must stop. We know from both history and experience that liberation cannot arrive in the form of bombs or be parachuted from the sky. Military intervention, sanctions, and geopolitical power struggles rarely produce democracy; more often they deepen authoritarianism, destroy social infrastructure, and weaken the very grassroots movements that could bring genuine change.

Second, there must be opposition, inside and outside Iran, to both state repression and foreign militarization. External interventions do not liberate society; they usually strengthen the security state, weaken autonomous movements, and allows the regime to equate dissent with treason. Anarchist analyses of the recent uprising have been right to insist on this dual rejection: against the Islamic Republic, and against any imperial or regional project that would hijack popular struggle.

Third, what is needed most is time, space, and material support for grassroots organization from below: labor organizing, women's resistance, mutual aid, neighborhood committees, and local councils. In Iran, durable democratic transformation will not come from geopolitics. It will come through forms of collective self-organization that can survive repression, resist war, and prevent the vacuum from being filled by another authoritarian force.

So my expectation is grim, but not hopeless. The regime may consolidate in the immediate term. The war may deepen repression. But the deeper social reality remains: the Islamic Republic has lost broad legitimacy, and a large part of society wants to dismantle it and move beyond it. The decisive question is whether anti-authoritarian and democratic forces can gain enough organizational capacity to shape that transition before the future is seized by militarists, foreign powers, or another elite project.

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