



*Rapporteur: Annaleah Westerhaug*

On October 25, 2022, CNA held a unique event titled “The Crackdown in Iran: A Women, Peace, and Security Situation Spotlight,” presented jointly by the Inclusive National Security and National Security Seminar initiatives. The virtual event offered insights into the ongoing anti-government protests in Iran following the death of Mahsa Amini on September 16, 2022. It discussed the regime’s crackdown and the implications for women, peace, and security issues both regionally and globally. CNA expert Dr. Michael Connell, principal research scientist, and the distinguished Dr. Nazee Moinian, non-resident scholar at the Middle East Institute, shared background on the Iranian protests and the 1979 revolution and offered their perspectives on the current events unfolding in Iran. Their presentations were followed by a rich discussion and Q&A with the audience. This event began with opening remarks from Halleh Seyson, divisional vice president at CNA’s Institute for Public Research, who shared her personal experience emigrating from Iran, and it was moderated by Nilanthi Samaranayake, research program director of CNA’s Strategy and Policy Analysis program.

#### **Reflections from Dr. Michael Connell and Dr. Nazee Moinian:**

- Dr. Connell discussed the nature of the protests unfolding in Iran, pointing out that their duration and scale are notably different than those of previous protests, such as the 2009 Green Revolution. These protests are wider in scope and have cut across demographics, with the hijab being a central symbol.
- Dr. Connell highlighted four key factors driving the protests thus far: the increase in morality crackdowns, economic issues (including corruption), the fight for freedom of information, and the regime’s brutal reaction to the protests.
- Dr. Connell explained that he would expect to see the following things if a revolution were to succeed: the protests would continue in strength and may expand farther geographically; the protestors’ agendas and goals would coalesce, potentially including a clear vision of how to replace the regime; a protest leader or leaders would emerge to rally behind; and the security forces would begin to defect. Dr. Connell emphasized that any defections from the regime’s security forces would make the protests an existential threat for the regime.
- Dr. Connell noted that the opposition currently lacks the direction and agility to respond to government actions. Without a leader, the regime has no one to negotiate with at present, if they wanted to engage.
- Dr. Moinian began her remarks by noting that this revolution is the first in Iran’s history to be led by women, and this revolution is emblematic of what women in Iran have been aspiring to achieve for decades. The killing of Mahsa Amini sparked the revolution, but the desire for serious societal change has always been present.
- Dr. Moinian pointed out the similarities and differences between these protests and the 1979 revolution. She framed these protests as the Iranian people calling for a reset of the 1979 revolution—demanding both their basic rights and the ability to participate in international fora. One significant difference is that women (and the broader population) now have access to a world of information online. They can recognize that their lives are different from those of their counterparts in the West. Access to information and the media has played an important role in empowering Iranian women. Dr. Connell echoed the importance of information, stating that the regime views the free flow of information as a threat because people are motivated by what they can see online.

- There was much discussion of the brutality of the regime and how the regime has relied on fear to rule. These protests are occurring despite this climate of fear. Dr. Moinian pointed out that the police often play the victims in these protests. Additionally, under Iranian law, protestors are considered "people who are fighting God." The Islamic regime portrays protestors as terrorists, violating God as the ultimate authority.
- Dr. Moinian advocated for stronger US support of the protestors, along with measures to isolate and pressure the regime. In particular, she stressed the importance of providing Iranian protestors with tools to access and share information. She also urged continuing international attention for the protests, encouraging attendees and the public to trade apathy for empathy.

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