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Urging Iranians to rise against Tehran is a hyper-risky move

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Foreign calls to back Iran's uprising risk harsher crackdowns and turning domestic unrest into a wider regional crisis. - Astro
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WHEN [US President Donald Trump abruptly cancelled meetings](#) with Iranian officials and publicly told Iranian protesters that “help is on its way,” he crossed a line that American presidents have flirted with before—but rarely without grave consequences.

What may sound like moral encouragement or strategic clarity is, in reality, a hyper-risky intervention that threatens to [intensify repression inside Iran](#), regionalise a domestic uprising, and deepen global instability at a time when the international system is already fraying.

Encouraging people in another sovereign state to rise against their government is not a neutral act. It is a form of political signalling that reshapes incentives on the ground.

For protesters, [such words can inflate expectations of external rescue](#), protection, or technological backing. The state confirms long-held suspicions of foreign orchestration.

In Iran's case, this combination is combustible.

Iran is no stranger to unrest.

It has weathered [student protests](#), [disputed elections](#), [economic revolts](#), and the [2022 rebellion](#) with a grim consistency.

Each episode followed a familiar pattern: initial mobilisation, rapid securitisation, communications blackouts, and a brutal reassertion of state control. What changes this time is the scale—and the explicit internationalisation of the moment.

By the [seventeenth day of the current uprising](#), some two thousand Iranians are reported to have been killed, a figure that already surpasses the casualties recorded during the 2022 unrest. This alone should give pause to any external actor tempted to escalate rhetorically.

When a regime feels existentially threatened—especially by what it perceives as foreign-backed agitation—it does not compromise. It cracks down harder.

A particularly dangerous new variable is now emerging: connectivity as a tool of resistance.

As Iranian authorities repeatedly [shut down or throttle the internet](#) to prevent coordination, protesters may increasingly demand satellite-based systems such as [Starlink](#) as an alternative communication backbone.

Restoring connectivity would [undoubtedly enhance coordination](#), organisation, and real-time mobilisation across cities and provinces.

Yet in Tehran, it would also be seen not as a humanitarian measure but as direct external intervention.

The moment satellite connectivity is framed as enabling resistance against the [Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps](#), the uprising is no longer purely domestic in the state's eyes.

It becomes a battlefield where technology, sovereignty, and regime survival collide.

History suggests that when [authoritarian systems interpret protests as foreign-enabled insurrections](#), repression becomes both more ruthless and more justified internally as national defence.

This is where Trump's rhetoric becomes especially perilous.

Promising "[help](#)" without defining its scope invites speculation—economic pressure, covert assistance, cyber operations, or even military options.

Ambiguity may be useful in diplomacy, but in moments of mass unrest, it is deadly. Protesters may [act on assumptions](#) that external support will materialise.

When it does not, they are left facing one of the most disciplined and ideologically hardened security apparatuses in the region.

The strategic risks extend far beyond Iran's borders. Iran is deeply embedded in [regional networks](#) stretching across Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and Yemen.

Any perception of an externally driven attempt at regime change increases the likelihood of [asymmetric retaliation](#)

—against shipping lanes, energy infrastructure, or allied interests.

For Asia and ASEAN economies, dependent on [stable sea lanes and predictable energy flows](#), the consequences would be immediate and severe.

From an ASEAN perspective, this episode reinforces a long-standing lesson: internal political change cannot be safely engineered from the outside.

Southeast Asia's history is littered with examples of [how foreign encouragement](#) of uprisings produced prolonged instability rather than liberation.

Sovereignty may be an imperfect shield, but its [erosion by great-power](#) signalling creates a world where force and disruption become normalised tools of politics.

There is also the question of nationalism.

External exhortations often strengthen, rather than weaken, hardliners. Many Iranians are [deeply frustrated](#) with their leadership, but that frustration does not automatically translate into a willingness to accept foreign tutelage.

When protest becomes associated with external powers, it risks alienating the very middle ground that sustained movements need to succeed.

None of this absolves Tehran of responsibility for repression or human rights abuses.

Those deserve unequivocal condemnation. But condemnation is not the same as incitement.

[Responsible statecraft](#) recognises that moral outrage must be matched with strategic restraint.

Loud encouragement without credible protection can increase casualties rather than reduce them.

If Washington truly seeks stability and fewer deaths, it must resist the illusion that revolutions can be summoned by presidential declarations or sustained by vague promises.

[Quiet diplomacy](#), multilateral pressure, humanitarian engagement, and carefully calibrated incentives are slow, frustrating, and politically unrewarding—but they are far less likely to produce catastrophic outcomes.

Urging Iranians to rise against Tehran may play well to certain domestic audiences in the United States.

On the ground, however, it risks turning a domestic uprising into a proxy confrontation, raising the body count while narrowing the path to any meaningful political resolution. In a world already governed too often by power rather than prudence, this is a gamble whose costs may far exceed its promises.

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