

Secretary Pompeo,

We the undersigned strongly oppose any efforts to destabilize Iran and bring about its economic collapse. The people of Iran have struggled to achieve democratic rule and independence for more than a century, and while this noble struggle has both made positive strides and suffered setbacks, outside interference has invariably undermined their efforts and strengthened Iran's authoritarian rulers.

Today, the Iranian people's struggle continues unabated. The Iranian government's mismanagement and corruption have once again increased the people's suffering and both political and economic frustration is on the rise. The Iranian government's ability to adequately meet the demands of the people remains unclear.

However, efforts to bring about the collapse of the Iranian economy through external pressures and sanctions, or a US-sponsored regime change in Iran (in the image of Iraq) will not bring about democracy in Iran but rather destabilize the country and put democracy out of the reach of the Iranian people. That is what it did in Iraq, where after a decade of devastating instability with more than 500,000 dead, Iraq holds elections but is far from a democracy that reflects the hopes and aspirations of its people.

Iran's only chance to achieve a sustainable democracy that reflects the wishes of its people comes from a process driven by the people of Iran, for the people of Iran. In short, change must come from inside of Iran – not from Washington or anywhere else. It is also crucial to bear in mind that Iranians have a long history with the United States, one that is alive in the memory of even young Iranians, and would compel them to respond to any American destabilisation with wariness and hostility.

Support for violent organizations such as the Mujahedin-e Khalq (MEK) - which has used terror to kill Iranians and Americans alike - by key advisors to and Members of the Trump administration raises serious concerns as to whether your administration's objective is to support the Iranian people's struggle for democracy and independence or to use their legitimate grievances to destabilize Iran and turn it into a failed state. Indeed, your administration's treatment of Iranians by preventing them en masse from traveling to the United States, certainly did not reflect any positive intent towards the people of Iran.

We urge you to cease all efforts to destabilize Iran and repeat the costly mistake the US committed in Iraq. If you truly wish to help the people of Iran, lift the Travel ban, adhere to the Iran nuclear deal—the JCPOA—and provide the people of Iran the economic relief they were promised and have eagerly awaited for three years, as every independent media has reported.

Those measures, more than anything, will provide the Iranian people with the breathing space to do what only they can do – push Iran towards democracy through a gradual process that achieves the benefits of freedom and liberty without turning Iran into another Iraq or Syria.

Sincerely,

Farrokh Negahdar, Pro-reform Political Activist

Mohsen Kadivar, Professor, Duke University

Reza Aslan, Best-Selling Author

Sanam Naraghi, ICAN

Farshad Farahat, Actor

Ahmad Kiarostami, Kiarostami Foundation

Touraj Daryaei, Professor of History

Gholam Peyman, Inventor of Lasik

Mehran Kamrava, Professor, Georgetown University-Qatar

Farideh Farhi, Independent Scholar

Steven Saeed Nasiri, Nasiri Ventures

Hamid Dabashi, Professor, Columbia University

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