

The judiciary escalates: executions, attribution warfare, and renewed transnational targeting

New reporting has introduced a dramatic new estimate of the crackdown's scale. The Sunday Times reports that as many as 16,500 Iranians may have been killed by the regime during the recent unrest. These numbers remain difficult to independently verify due to communications disruption and the regime's systematic suppression of information flows, but the appearance of such a figure is itself strategically important: it signals a widening perception—inside and outside Iran—that the state response has crossed into a phase of mass lethality.

At the same time, internet access is slowly returning across parts of the country. This should not be misread as regime restraint. A partial restoration can reflect two parallel dynamics: first, a decline in street intensity, allowing the regime to lower the immediate cost of a full blackout; and second, a more deliberate operational purpose—to observe what information escapes, identify who is uploading footage, and map networks involved in distributing evidence abroad. The return of connectivity is therefore not merely a technical development, but a potential shift in the regime's surveillance posture from blunt denial to targeted exposure and attribution.

Externally, the diaspora opposition has entered a highly active mobilization phase, with demonstrations emerging across multiple countries. Symbolically, these rallies are notable for the dominance of Iran's national flag and the widespread display of imagery associated with the monarchy—Crown Prince Reza Pahlavi, the late Shah, and the former Empress. This matters not only as political branding, but because it shapes the regime's threat assessment: Tehran does not interpret these gatherings as “spontaneous sympathy,” but as part of a broader legitimacy contest over who represents Iran's future.

In parallel, the regime's propaganda apparatus is operating at full speed. State-linked media and affiliated channels are releasing images, clips, and mini-documentaries portraying the unrest as a foreign-orchestrated operation, framing demonstrators as “terrorists” and labeling opposition networks as externally controlled. This narrative is not just messaging—it is pre-justification: a legal and political framework designed to normalize mass repression, widen the definition of guilt, and prepare both domestic and international audiences for executions and heavy sentencing.

The most consequential signal now comes from the judiciary itself. Gholam-Hossein Mohseni-Ejei, head of Iran's judiciary, wrote:

“We will not abandon the pursuit and prosecution of the criminals behind the recent crimes—whether in domestic courts or through international channels. The President of the United States, the leaders of the cursed Zionist regime, and all other supporters and backers who have provided weapons and propaganda to the criminals and terrorists involved in the recent events are among those who are guilty. In accordance with the scale and extent of their crimes, they will be pursued, tried, and punished.”

This statement should be read as a dual escalation. Domestically, it signals a judicial crackdown designed to culminate in executions, framed as punishment for “crimes” tied to national security and “terrorism.” Internationally, it is a warning that Tehran intends to expand its pursuit beyond Iran's borders, portraying foreign political actors and external supporters as criminal accomplices. In practice, this rhetoric historically correlates with increased risk to Iranians abroad, including intimidation campaigns, surveillance, coercion of family members inside Iran, and, targeted violence through intermediaries.

Outlook: As street unrest declines, the regime's coercive response may shift from visible mass repression to selective judicial terror and transnational targeting. If protests remain fragmented and connectivity stabilizes, Tehran's most likely next step is not reconciliation—but controlled escalation through courts, staged confessions, and high-profile punishments meant to restore deterrence. The Ejei signal indicates a regime that is not merely reacting, but actively preparing the next phase. At the same time, the trajectory will be heavily shaped by international posture, especially whether major Western actors choose to move beyond statements and symbolic support. President Trump has explicitly signaled a willingness to confront Tehran's leadership, and the key variable now is whether the international community will translate rhetoric into meaningful action—in support of an unarmed population facing a heavily armed dictatorship.