

“Bloody November”: The Travesty of Propaganda and Impunity of Human Tragedy

How Was The “Bloody November”
Reported and Broadcasted?



IRAN FACT RECORDS
NOVEMBER 2022

This report is dedicated to the brave and unsung heroes of Aban 1398 and their families. Those who gave their life and freedom for a Free Iran. We stand alongside them and the greater Movement for Truth and Justice in Iran.

Contents

Preface	3
Approach	6
Terminology	6
What Happened in November 2019 (Aban-e 98)	7
15 November 2019	8
1 Events of November 2019	10
1.1 Psychological Propaganda Warfare amid the Repressive Crackdown	13
2 The Mechanisms of “Making Crimes against Humanity Invisible”	18
2.1 Reporting and Broadcasting Mechanisms of the November 2019 Massacre	18
2.2 The Game of “Expert Narratives”	19
2.3 Deployment of Euphemism	19
2.4 Exaggerating the Effect of Sanctions and Denying the Fundamen- tal Political and Socio-Economic Justice Demands of the Protests	20
2.5 Disproportionate Focus on “Vandalism”, in lieu of Focusing on Death Tolls and the Usage of Labels such as “Vandals” and “Ri- oters” to Defame Non-violent Protesters	21
2.6 Neglecting the Islamic Regime’s Use of Heavy Weapons	22
3 Socio-political Contexts and Common Misconceptions and Mis- representation About the Islamic Republic and Iran	22
3.1 The Political Context: the Labyrinth of the Islamic Republic’s Political System	23
3.1.1 Role of the Supreme National Security Council	24
3.2 The Economic Context	25
3.2.1 Suburbia and Suburban Slums: The Telling Tale of Impov- erishment and Decades-long Socio-Economic Catastrophe .	28
4 Documentation of November 2019 Atrocities: Coverage, Under- coverage, and Cover-Up	29
4.1 Regime’s Access-peddling as a Mechanism of Controlling the Flow and Content of Information out of Iran	29

4.2	Under-Coverage and Mis-Reporting of November 2019 After the Crackdown as a Mechanism to Undermine the Documentation of the Crimes	30
4.3	Regime’s Judicial and Security Mechanisms to Undermine the Documentation of the Crimes and its efforts at systematic coverup . .	30
4.4	Preying on the Undocumented Poor	32
5	The Crisis of Broad, Serious and Ongoing Human Rights Abuses in Iran	33

“We know a massacre has taken place; the question remains however: how can we explain it?”

—Arnold Hottinger,
the only journalist present in the
aftermath of Hama Massacre of 1982

Preface

This report scrutinizes the journalism and broadcasting of the tragic events of November 2019 (Aban 1398) that are now widely recognized as the bloodiest crackdown by the Islamic Republic since its founding in the advent of the 1979 Revolution^{1 2}. The scale and caliber of the atrocities have since been the subject of numerous reports by mainstream human rights organizations, major media outlets, and research think tanks, yet no state entity or authority has assumed any responsibility for the massacres. In fact, the state military-intelligence and security complex in tandem with the regime’s revolutionary judiciary have persecuted and terrorized the victims’ families into silence and have thus sought to enforce a nationwide repressive campaign to cover up the true number of the victims.

In the face of the Islamic Republic’s systemic crackdown on any effort by individuals or the media to record and document the true scope and depth of the atrocities and the number of victims, several organizations, mostly based outside Iran, continue to carry out the painstaking task of documenting this nationwide historic state violence. In November 2021 (Aban 1400), the [Aban’s People Tribunal](#) attempted to shed some light on many of the atrocities of the Bloody November in a symbolic, but judicially steadfast manner, to seek justice for the victims.

Living in the age of instant news dissemination, it is a primary concern of the present undertaking that the reporting on the origins, scale and mechanisms

¹Plenty of sources keep referring to Aban 98 as the "bloodiest crackdown since the 1979 revolution": NYT, HRW, Reuters, to name a few: [Special Report: Iran’s leader ordered crackdown on unrest - 'Do whatever it takes to end it' | Reuters](#)

²This statement is perhaps being invalidated at the time of publishing of this report (November 2022), as the Islamic regime continues to carry out an extremely violent crackdown of the “Women, Life, Freedom” protests in Iran.

of the November 2019 massacres are yet to reach the scale of Bloody November's tragic events. Proportional to their vast budgetary and specialist capacity, the many media outlets, human rights NGOs, and major think tanks have yet to produce thorough and incisive investigative reporting of the atrocities. Some entities, primarily those based in Iran, and in compliance with the mandatory security directives of the Islamic Republic, have managed to spin the peaceful popular uprising as a violent revolt by street thugs. By deploying narrow and reductionist public opinion manipulation techniques, they have sought to account for the root causes of the protests as having been fueled by "an unexpected rise in gasoline prices", and have justified the regime's disproportionate brutal military scale response as a self-defense in response to "widespread" and "criminal" vandalism. In so doing, they have thus eliminated the true origins of these protests in the broader context of socio-political protests in Iran during the recent years. Many have consistently labeled the November 2019 protests as apolitical, momentary, short-lived and violent and ascribed their occurrence to a consequence of international sanctions on the Islamic regime in Iran. As our investigation illustrates, this reductionist and manipulative narrative has developed into an arm of the Islamic Republic's propaganda machine whose tongs have reached the Western European and North American media. In some cases, the regime's propaganda has influenced some of these world-renowned media outlets' reporting, leading them to, at worst, a cacophony of the regime's "fuel-caused-the-riots" claims, and at best, an assortment of many equivocal paraphrasings of the true origins of the Bloody Aban riots.³

The above-mentioned reports characteristically place the adversarial relations of the US and the Islamic Republic of Iran at the core of analytical explanation, and one might say as "the international backdrop" of the root causes of the Bloody November, as well as any other significant socio-economic trouble that is presently plaguing the Islamic Republic. Such an atrocious analysis functions as a propaganda arm of the Islamic Republic in a twofold sense: On the one hand, it distracts from the manner by which the Islamic Republic has evolved into a full-fledged kleptocracy, masquerading as a constitutional theocracy governed by some measure of "ostensibly" popular representation. And, on the other hand, it normalizes the tyrannical repressive measures deployed by the regime as "expected" reactions of any "average" government to "an unfortunate socio-economic downturn" that can happen "to any country," leading to some measure of collective and humanitarian strife. All such reports rely on "expected reaction of any state" to spin the Bloody November as a tragic "footnote" to US-Islamic Republic animosity and hide the true scale of the systematic massacre.

³For a documented example, see [section 2.1.5. of Iran Fact Records' Open Letter to the NYT](#) concerning Ms. Farnaz Fassihi's reporting of the Bloody Aban for the New York Times.

Thus, in the next segment, and before delving fully into our discussion of the (mis)representations and (mis)reportings of the Bloody November press, media, NGO, and think tanks, our report cannot but offer a concise preface to the political, social, institutional and economic catastrophes that have inflicted much suffering upon Iranians over the past four decades. The reports' analysis hinges upon identifying the mechanisms instrumental to the repeated generation of such misinformation. We believe that a critical review of such reporting is essential to a factually informed and truth-based approach to "Exposing and Making Visible the Atrocities as Crimes against Humanity; an approach that fits the totalitarian political environment and dire Human Rights situation in Iran.

Our investigation contends that the international community is consequently still in the dark almost two years after such a wide-scale massacre, due to the systematic failure in the reporting of the Bloody November on at least three counts:

- 1) the human rights violations committed by the state or its agents at the time, namely, the physical suppression and massacre of the victims;
- 2) the ongoing human rights violations, namely the ones committed against the families of the slain or the detainees;
- 3) the narrational-propagandist oppression of the Bloody November.

To accord justice to the first two, the present report contends, one must rectify and counter the Islamic regime's propaganda and its witting and unwitting aiders and abettors. Doing so requires the provision of a factually informed account of what happened in November 2019, which may prove to be an important turning point in contemporary Iranian history. The authors' endeavor is thus not limited to exposing the Islamic Republic's propagandist and manipulative machinations to "deny" and distract from its principal role in the commission of crimes against humanity during November 2019. Rather, they wish more importantly to expose how the non-Iran-based media have become the witting and unwitting arms of the regime's propaganda. In the course of achieving the latter, the report apprises the media, journalists and analysts who are covering Iran and Iranian affairs of these methods, so that they may be sensitive to the ostensibly innocent sophistry of the regime's propaganda and many of its Western-based proxies that masquerade as pundits, professional journalists, and think-tank analysts. Reducing the complex struggle of the Iranian people against the Islamic Republic regime to –more often than not– externally induced (i.e. US sanctions and the like) socio-economic events effectively abandons the Iranian people in their fight for democracy. This is how, for example, a popular uprising –which is but one link in the long chain of

Iranian society’s centennial struggle for democratic constitutionalism– is rendered an isolated incident or some urban revolt born out of a decision-making *faux pas*. Such reductionist takes in reports and analyses have contributed to concealing the systematic nature of continuous and exacerbating repression over the past few decades. In this report we underscore the following:

- 1) How some reports and interpretations have managed to help the Islamic regime deny these Mass Atrocities;
- 2) What mechanisms have been used to support this act of denial. Denial of atrocities requires certain discursive and propagandist elements that are generally used by the Islamic regime’s apologists in their quest to steer and control public opinions.

Approach

Since the 1970s, the “Right to Truth” movement has culminated in a new human rights wave accompanied by many concurring judicial developments in establishing universal jurisdiction for the prosecution of crimes against humanity committed in other countries. The “Right to Truth” has also pushed the traditional frontiers of international humanitarian and human rights law into a vehicle of transition from undemocratic regimes with an extensive record of crimes against humanity to sustainable democratization. The Right to Truth is thus fundamentally instructive to our analysis as a theoretical and practical criterion in pursuit of the truth of the Bloody November.

Terminology

In this report the terms Islamic Republic, Islamic regime (Nezam-e Eslami in Persian), and regime have been used alternatively. The term Supreme Leader (the hyperbolic honorific used by the Islamic Republic) is also used interchangeably with, and in reference to, Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei, the theocratic ruler of the Islamic Republic and its supreme commander-in-chief. Slums and working class suburbia as used in this report have been often used interchangeably as they share similar and overlapping socio-economic and demographic characteristics in the case of Iran. Any reference to security and intelligence forces is inclusive of the Islamic Republic’s police forces, operatives of the Ministry of Intelligence of the Islamic Republic, the paramilitary Basij militia, the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) as well as of all their official and unofficial suborgans.

What Happened in November 2019 (Aban-e 98)

The causes of Bloody November are rooted in fundamental social, political and economic upheavals that have befallen Iran over the past four decades through the exponential expansion of the Islamic Republic's repressive revolutionary military-intelligence-security economic and industrial complex.

The Iranian people's living experience under the Islamic Republic of Iran over the past four decades has been anything but normal. Combined with their first-hand experience of the Islamic regime's constant mismanagement of the economy and ever expanding corruption, post-revolutionary Iranians have been subjected to one period of hyper-inflation after another, usually instigated by government-mandated increases in commodity prices. Any such surges, mandated by the government, have been a constant in the ever tightening grip of state controls on many basic commodities. They have always been followed by an inflationary surge of the prices of fundamental commodities and services- despite the government's constant denial of any connection between runaway inflation and state-mandated price surges. As a matter of fact, any such drastic social or economic measures in the midst of an inflationary economy have historically functioned as "a catalyst", sparking the powder-keg of nationwide dissatisfaction into full blown riots in the early 1990s in the working-class suburbs, shanty-towns, and slums of major urban centers such as Mashhad and Tehran.

Until the mid 2010s, the Iranian middle class and white collar labor coped with the never-easing inflation by cutting corners to the point of reducing the size of their food baskets. However, since the mid 2010s, substantial price increases have drastically reduced the purchasing power of the middle classes, limiting their access to the very basic necessities of life and forcing them to [reduce their daily nutritional consumption](#) by the day. Lower income classes and laborers have been in much more dire conditions. During recent years, high inflation rates have not only caused meat, poultry, fish, dairy or fruits to disappear from lower classes' diets, but many people are now struggling to keep the Iranian staple foods (bread and rice) on their table.

It was under these unceasing dire economic circumstances, created by decades of economic mismanagement and total state corruption by the Islamic Republic, that the gasoline prices increased from 10000 Rials to 30000 Rials overnight. Given the arbitrary and corrupt state of the Islamic Republic's economy, the inflationary impact of fuel price increases in Iran is usually considerably higher than the comparable impact of such policies in many other countries.

Indeed, a [report](#) published by the Islamic Republic's own Majlis (Islamic Parliament) in 2006, calculated the correlation coefficient between gasoline price increases and inflation, asserting that for every 10% increase in gasoline prices, there was a corresponding inflationary average increase of 1.54% in the price of

basic services and commodities across the board. Even if one may be prone to discount this estimate from 2006 (when the Iranian economy was in a relatively better shape) as inapplicable to the past decade's ever worsening economy in Iran, the 200% fuel price increase in November 2019 would have been responsible for causing a 31% inflation most conservatively. With its most complex intelligence and security apparatus, and the then president of the Islamic Republic as the chair of its Supreme National Security Council (SNSC), the regime could not simply plead ignorance or sheer incompetence in anticipating the public reaction to the overnight and unannounced sharp fuel price increase. The fuel price surge sent shockwaves through the core of the country's majority working classes that were already struggling with a [41.2% inflation](#) at that very moment.

15 November 2019

In the very early hours of November 15, 2019, the government announced the price increases, without any advanced warning. People were caught off guard and panic ensued in anticipation of the incoming hyper-inflationary tsunami of price increases and hunger. Many chose to walk out in protest in a peaceful manner against what they perceived to be a most oppressive dictate. In the very early hours of that same morning, and after the announcement of the 200% fuel price increase, countless people crammed the roads with their cars in many cities across Iran, and shut off their engines in the middle of the streets. The demonstrators were not even chanting slogans and were simply hoping for the government to acknowledge their peaceful protestations and find a way to moderate the execution of such an economically draconian measure. Instead, they were met with a systematic brutal crackdown by uniformed and undercover security forces and the militia. Snipers targeted people with military grade assault weapons from atop [government](#) and [administrative](#) buildings. The uniformed anti-riot troops indiscriminately aimed at demonstrators, displaying blatantly their intent to kill by shooting them in their heads and hearts. The consistent pattern of shooting hundreds in the head and the heart pointed at the presence of a shoot-to-kill directive nationwide. [According to Islamic Republic's own Ministry of Labour](#), which also featured in some of the [press reports](#) at the time, more than one third of the country's population were living under the poverty line. And these were the very same people who were being shot down with live ammunition in response to their non-violent protests.

The Islamic Republic regime engaged in a nationwide massacre over the course of three days. The estimates and published accounts report more than a thousand dead; but the Islamic regime has never disclosed the numbers and is actively blocking all efforts at exposing the scale of its Crimes against Humanity of November 2019.

Our meta-critical report and analysis of the reporting on the November massacres is organized, and present, in the following order:

1. Events of November 2019
2. The Mechanisms of “Making Crimes against Humanity Invisible”
3. Socio-political Contexts and Common Misconceptions and Misrepresentation About the Islamic Republic and Iran
4. Documentation of November 2019 Atrocities: Coverage, Under-coverage, and Cover-Up
5. The Crisis of Broad, Serious and Ongoing Human Rights Abuses in Iran

1 Events of November 2019

Iran is one of the very few countries in the world which has been experiencing [two-digit inflation over the past four decades](#). Purchasing power has been reduced year after year by rates only comparable with the 1970s stagflation or the 1930s Great Depression. In recent years, economic-related and anti-poverty protests all across Iran have increased noticeably. In the last days of December 2017 and early days of 2018 (i.e. Dey 1396 in Jalali Calendar), Iranians across [more than 100 towns](#) and villages [rose up in protest](#). [Poverty](#)^{4, 5}, [absolute incompetence](#)⁶, [systemic corruption](#)⁷ (and their routine public exposures), [social](#)⁸ and [political oppression](#)⁹ –among them forcing a narrow interpretation of [Islamic ideology](#)¹⁰ onto the people¹¹– have been chief amongst people’s frustrations with the regime. Moreover, the people widely recognize that the Islamic regime [funds](#)¹² its regional [proxies](#)¹³ and their [military operations](#)¹⁴ and further [impoverishes](#)¹⁵ the national

⁴Demonstrators [chanting](#): “Benzin geroontar mishe, faghir faghirtar mishe” (roughly: “The gasoline becomes more expensive, the poor become poorer”) in Babol, Iran.

⁵Demonstrators [chanting](#): “Vaveyla, vaveyla, dige pool nadarim” (roughly: “Oh no, Oh no, we don’t have money no more.”) in Rasht, Iran.

⁶Demonstrators [chanting](#): “Toop, tank, feshfеше, Akhoond bayad gom beshe” (roughly: “Hey hey, ho ho, Mullahs have to go”) in Mashhad, Iran.

⁷Demonstrators [chanting](#): “Poole naft gom shode, kharje basiji shode” (roughly: “The oil money has been lost, it has been spent on Basiji militias”) in University of Tehran, Iran.

⁸Demonstrators [chanting](#): “Mellate ma aasie, bardedari kafie” (roughly: “Our nation is full of wrath; enough with enslavement”)

⁹Demonstrators [chanting](#): “Dictator haya kon, mamlekato raha kon” (roughly: “Dictator, have some shame, let go of this country”)

¹⁰Demonstrators [chanting](#): “Eslam-o pelle kardan, Mellat-o zelle kardan” (roughly: “they’ve used Islam as an excuse to choke people”) in Tehran, Iran.

¹¹Since the very early days of the Islamic regime’s ascendance to power in 1979, the state has been consistently inserting itself into people’s lives by enforcing draconian regulations –such as mandatory Hijab for women– through its “morality” police. It has been routinely invading people’s private sphere in the name of preserving principles of Islamic chastity. Raiding private parties, flogging people for drinking alcoholic beverages, arresting women for “not wearing proper Hijab” or couples for accompanying each other without being married are common examples of such intrusions.

¹²Demonstrators [chanting](#): “Poole naft gom shode, kharje Felestin shode” (roughly: “The oil money has gone missing, it has been spent on Palestine [Hamas]) in Mashhad, Iran.

¹³A young man is giving a [speech](#) amongst cheering protesting peers: “How much longer should my money be funneled to Gaza and Lebanon [Hezbollah]” in Birjand, South Khorasan, Iran.

¹⁴Demonstrators [chanting](#): “Soorye kam avorde, taghsire mellat chie?” (roughly: “Why should the Iranians pay to keep the failing Syrian regime in power?”) in Darab, Fars, Iran.

¹⁵Demonstrators [chanting](#): “Na pool darim na benzin, goore babaye Felestin” (roughly: “There is no more money left for us, nor gas, to heck with Palestine [Hamas]”) in Eslamshar, Tehran, Iran.

coffers of the cash that is direly needed to improve the lot of tens of millions of Iranians who are struggling to meet their basic necessities for food, clothing, shelter, and transportation. Overall, the regime's domestic and regional socio-economic and military policies have been the cause of much anger and frustration amongst Iranians from all walks of life – saving for a meager privileged armed minority that is part of the military-economic-security-intelligence rentiering kleptocratic complex¹⁶. Long before the overnight announcement of the 200% fuel price hike at midnight of November 15, 2019, these underlying causes had already turned the average Iranian's life into a maelstrom of social agony and economic misery.

In such an atmosphere of tremendous discontent, peaceful protests spontaneously appeared from the early hours of the morning of November 15, 2019 - just shortly after the announcement of the fuel price hike dropped on tens of millions of struggling working class people like a ton of bricks. The protests manifested themselves in various forms. [Some parked their vehicles in the middle of the streets](#). Some simply began [sit-ins in the middle of the streets](#). Some [played music](#). Some played cards. Some [played soccer](#) and some even danced on the streets. In one instance, a few women were chanting atop a pedestrian overpass, inviting others to join the protests. Some [were handing out flowers](#) upon coming face-to-face with the heavily armed security forces. Later in the day, many Iranians joined the protests on various social media platforms calling on their fellow citizens to shut down their car engines and park on the roads.

As the collective action gathered incredible momentum and crowds grew to mass demonstrations, a seamless fusion of activity emerged, both virtual and on the streets' pavement, that sought to boost the spontaneous protests' momentum and prevent them from fizzling out in the face of the piling up of various companies, often battalions, of security forces in every neighborhood across the country. With the onset of a social media storm in support of the protests, some inside Iran [began noticing various problems with accessing the Internet](#). Yet due to the regime's preordained restrictions on the Internet the flow of the news was intermittent. Indeed, the state of the Internet under the Islamic Republic is yet another tale of its repressive methods against free speech and free association. Since the introduction of the internet to the public on a national scale about twenty years ago, the regime has placed many constraints on the accessibility, speed, and quality of bandwidth. Indeed, the state of the Internet in Iran is quite [abysmal](#) and [limited](#). The speeds are throttled by the State, and the internet is [heavily censored](#). It is in this context that various citizen journalists

¹⁶There fortunately exists responsible investigative journalism committed to lifting the veil on the military economic kleptocratic complex that has turned Iran and the region into its rentiering fief. For instance, see [The Quds Force in White Collars](#) and [The Quds Force in White Collars: Meet the Executives](#) and most notably [The Corrupt Network that delivered the Iranian Presidency to Ebrahim Raisi](#).

began reporting some interruption or denial of service, but there was no Internet shutdown as of yet.

By Saturday (November 16, 2019), the protests became nationwide (geographically and demographically) at an unprecedented level – straddling from the [north](#), [northeast](#) and [northwest](#), to the [south](#), [southeast](#), [southwest](#), sweeping the country all the way to the [east](#) and the [west](#) and the [center](#). It was shortly after the beginning of the protests that government officials and judicial authorities as well as the state police started labeling the protests as “seditious riots”. As of the morning of Saturday, November 16, the internet connections, both data and WiFi, began to become [patchy, unstable and completely disconnected in some areas](#). This was a signal to many protesters that the regime was preparing itself for a brutal and bloody crackdown. That evening, the Supreme National Security Council (SNSC), chaired by then President Hassan Rouhani, [ordered a near-total shutdown of the internet](#) across the entire country, taking the systematic operation of the crackdown to the next level.

The regime took several other measures to control the crowds by means of [closing down](#) primary and secondary schools in [some provinces](#), ostensibly due to “severe smog” due to [cold weather and pollution](#), while dispatching [SMS text messages en masse to millions across the country](#) warning the people against attending the protests and threatening them with prosecution.

These warning messages were sent out as concerns were growing about the increasing state-led violence and the rapid surge in the death toll. The publishing of these images and [videos](#)¹⁷ of [brutal oppression](#) of the protesters on citizens’ social media accounts showing [shooting at close range](#) and use of [heavy military weapons](#) in at least two cities fueled these concerns. Local eye-witness citizen reporting revealed the deployment of military grade weaponry against protesters in several densely populated areas. We can cite the massacre in MoaaliAbad, a suburb of Shiraz, where [a helicopter upon which a heavy machine gun was mounted](#) was [shooting](#) people. Another instance of the deployment of military grade weapons against civilians was Jarrahi (Chamran) town of Mahshahr county, where heavy machine guns and [DShK-mounted pickup trucks](#) were mowing down the protesters. [Clear footage](#) from the [killing of a few young protestors](#) near Robaat Karim (near Tehran) demonstrated the unprecedented scale of the massacre. [The age group](#) of the murdered young men, the location of fatal shots on their bodies (heads, skulls and hearts), bullet types and the total and systematic [Internet shutdown across the country](#), all together add up to expose the broader plan of carrying out and directing a “massacre”.

¹⁷Despite the near-total internet shutdown, citizen journalists used various means to publish their eye-witness accounts on social media. The publication of these citizen reports from inside Iran slowed down and eventually almost completely vanished as the internet shutdown became virtually complete.

After two days of incessant crackdown, it finally dawned on the authorities that the protests were showing no sign of dissipating. It was at this very moment that the Islamic Republic's "Supreme Leader", Seyyed Ali Khamenei [sought to somewhat wash the bloodshed off his hands](#) by declaring that "he is not an expert on economic issues related to the fuel price hike", but identified the protesters as "thugs" and blamed "the enemies of Islamic Republic" for orchestrating the protests. Khamenei thus refused to take any responsibility for the ongoing massacre despite the fact that his very own directly [established and appointed](#) extra-constitutional "Supreme Council for Economic Coordination between Heads of the Branches of the State", [acting under the auspices of the Supreme Leader](#), had raised the fuel prices so abruptly. Not only did the protesters take Khamenei's speech as a refusal to assume any responsibility for the violent and brutal crackdown, but they also saw it as a crude and blunt *carte blanche* to the regime's repressive military-intelligence, security, and militia apparatus to continue carrying out the nationwide bloody massacre. Mohammad Javad Kolivand –the Parliamentary Affairs Deputy of the Ministry of Interior– had [asserted](#) that protests had been carried out in more than 700 different places in the country.

1.1 Psychological Propaganda Warfare amid the Repressive Crackdown

Realizing much belatedly that the protests –for which they could not identify any domestic or local leadership– were not letting up in the face of their brutal crackdown operation, the regime resorted to escalating its crackdown through a combination of coordinated propaganda campaign as well as the deployment of military grade weaponry to cleanse the streets one way or the other. Regime's military-security top brass and other state officials henceforth took to their usual pulpit on the state radio and television and the Friday Prayer Sermons to wage psychological warfare against the protesters at once, and mobilize their support base; a base that they had not so far been able to bring to the streets to counter the protests.

Hossein Salami, commander-in-chief of the Islamic Revolution's Guards Corps (IRGC), [compared the protests](#) to a "full blown world war". Abdolreza Rahmani Fazli, Minister of Interior, [warned and threatened](#) the people that the police "had thus far displayed much restraint in the face of the ongoing 'violence' and 'vandalism' of 'a handful of rioters', but the police and the security forces 'will fulfill their duties' should such lawless acts that were disrupting the peace continue." What ensued was clearly indicative of the issuance of a general order for an indiscriminate, military-style crackdown through the deployment and operationalization of a full array of military weaponry and ammunition against civilians without

warning.

The existence of such a blanket “shoot-to-kill” decree through a universal military-scale operation against unarmed civilians is demonstrably evident by considering the large number of shopkeepers, tradespeople, shoppers, and commuters among the victims. These victims were usually passers-by or neighborhood bystanders, who were caught and killed both at the flashpoints between protesters and security forces as well as at farther intersections. The emergent shooting pattern is itself evidence of the deployment of snipers shooting from a distance, as well as undercover marksmen who were mixing with the crowds and were shooting people at point-blank range. Of the countless unknown victims of this stage of the crackdown, the identities of only a few dozen have [come to light](#). [Ebrahim Ketabdar](#) (30 years old) was a shopkeeper who was shot to death [in front of his shop](#), [Mina Sheikhi](#) (59 years old) was shot to death as she was watching the protests from her apartment’s rooftop. [Amirreza Abdollahi](#) (13 years old) was shot to death as he was passing by a gathering of protesters. [Mobin Abdollahi](#) (24 years old) was shot to death as he was observing the protests from inside a coffee shop. Moreover, there are documented cases of school children and citizens on their way to school or work (or sometimes at their workplace) who were shot on the sidewalks by gunmen and snipers on rooftops. [Seyed Ali Mousavi](#) (12 years old) and [Mohammad Dastankhah](#) (15 years old) are among teenagers who were fatally shot by Islamic regime security forces on their way home from school. [Pouya Bakhtiari](#), a 27 year-old electrical engineer was another one of the protesters who was shot and killed in Karaj. A vegan and an animal rights advocate, Bakhtiari was dedicated to civil disobedience and nonviolent resistance methods to protest poverty and state corruption. On the morning of November 16th, he took to the streets and captured multiple [videos on his smartphone](#), in which he joyously talks about the people’s victory in the streets. That very night (evening of November 16), while attending the protests alongside his mother and sister, he was [shot in the head](#) and killed by the security forces.

The consistent pattern of indiscriminate fatal shootings pursued the singular objective of terrorizing the public maximally and indiscriminately by shooting them in their vital organs. Whether from close range or by snipers, the common thread of all shootings constituted shooting civilians (bystanders, passersby, or protesters) indiscriminately and abruptly (without warning) usually in the skull or upper torso, i.e. heads and chests, as well as simultaneous or successive automatic gunshots directed at groups of individuals or masses of demonstrators. The emergent pattern was to spread angst and chaos to terrorize the public to such a level that it would not only disperse the protesters, but to dissuade all others from joining the protests.

We must particularly call to attention the exceedingly rare –yet most self-incriminating– statements by regime authorities after the November 2019 crack-

downs. These statements leave no doubt that massacring the protesters was a supreme priority for the Islamic regime's upper echelon that guaranteed them the quashing of the protests once and for all. The statements that we cite hereafter are blatant testimonies of the regime ruling elites' brutal determination and criminal consensus to eradicate the protests.

In an [interview on April 5, 2021](#), Mahmoud Sadeghi (member of Parliament from Tehran at the time of the protests) recalled: "One of the representatives [of the Islamic Parliament] was gleeful about the Reuters' announcement of 1500 dead [in November 2019], as [he believed] this number would strike terror into the people's hearts and would make them wary of ever taking part in any protest again. [...] Regime's security authorities held the view that should they hesitate in suppressing and stifling the protests swiftly, all would be totally out of hand. They feared the protests would sweep the whole country and [any such nationwide protest] would be simply uncontrollable." Of grave importance are Sadeghi's recollection of his meetings with [Ali Shamkhani](#), the secretary of the Supreme National Security Council (SNSC), i.e. a direct appointee of Supreme Leader Khamenei and his point-man on the council. Sadeghi's recollections reveal that the SNSC made two critical decisions as the protests were unfolding and getting out of hand in the early hours of their outbreak: 1) the nationwide blockade of the internet; and 2) the indiscriminate killing of the protesters.

Sadeghi recalled Shamkhani's response to Sadeghi's complaints over the (at the time ongoing) crackdowns: "That day I told Mr Shamkhani, 'these are the people [on the streets]; they [the security forces] are killing the people on the streets. What are you doing? If the people did not leave the streets and kept their ground, are you going to kill them all?' Shamkhani responded to me: '*Valo balagh ma balagh* (Arabic expression – not commonly known in Persian; in this context roughly meaning "last call is over"); **we will kill!**'"¹⁸

Another critical fact about the November 2019 protests, which has been often under reported –if not totally ignored– by many media outlets, was that the announcement of the gasoline price increase was not done through the usual governmental and administrative channels, that is, through the government's spokesperson or the responsible minister, or the president himself. Instead, the

¹⁸The Arabic expression (ولو بلغ ما بلغ) attributed to Shamkhani by Sadeghi, as stated in Khomeini's religious interpretation, means that silence or *Taqiya* (another Arabic word and an Islamic practice; where one can cover, hide or dissimulate –by silence or omission– their thoughts or intentions, ostensibly to face off persecution) has a limit. If and when Islam or the Islamic regime is threatened due to one's silence or *Taqiya*, *Taqiya* or tolerance is not permitted anymore". The invocation of this Islamic principle by Shamkhani (as is common practice by almost all Islamic regime's authorities) essentially means that the Islamic regime can only put up with "annoying nuisances" such as showing respect for human life as long as it is not under threat. After that point, shooting and killing people is all but permitted.

price hike statement was issued by the “National Iranian Oil Products Distribution Company” (NIOPDC). In fact, on November 12, 2019 –just three days before the official price hike announcement– the same organization (NIOPDC) had [denied the “rumors”](#) about any upcoming fuel price hikes. The abruptness of the price hike and its unusual manner of advertising to the public acted, we assert, as a flash that set off an extremely socio-economically exhausted people’s collective patience into a nationwide explosive protest bomb.

To add insult to injury, in a [meeting on November 27, 2019](#), Hassan Rouhani (then President of the Islamic Republic), proclaimed that he,, too,, was made aware of the gasoline price increase on Friday morning. It is imperative to inform our readers that Rouhani, in his ex-officio capacity as the President of the Islamic Republic, had been the Chair of the SNSC since 2013 and had served on the same body –as the direct appointee of Supreme Leader Khamenei– as its (first and longest-serving) secretary between 1989 to 2003. This peculiar method of breaking the news, combined with Rouhani’s absolving himself of any direct responsibility and laying the blame on the SNSC, was clearly indicative of the regime’s effort to deflect the blame from themselves for for the mass brutality that the regime was bringing upon thousands of innocent souls. Such renunciations on the part of these officials is also indicative of their intimate “real time” knowledge of the depth and caliber of the atrocities as they were being committed by their security forces on those days.

Between November 16 and November 24, 2019, the regime dropped an iron curtain on any reporting of the protests to cover up its crimes. As the state-mandated blockade of the internet had made the citizen-reporting of the events and the scale of atrocities almost impossible, the Islamic regime’s authorities refused to disclose any information about the number or identities of those who had been killed or arrested. It was not until more than six months later in June of 2020 that Abdolreza Rahmani Fazli, Minister of Interior, [declared](#) a “rough estimate” of 225 people killed, while refusing to give out any more details. However, the state propaganda [sought to further justify and whitewash the massacre](#) of their proclaimed “225 casualties” by stating that some of the victims had been shot by firearms not registered with the security forces and that some of these victims were in reality security forces killed at the hands of the protesters. In a [report published by Reuters](#) on December 23, 2019, the news agency put the number of fatalities around 1500, with only 547 of them identified. [28 children](#) have so far been identified among the slain. Meanwhile, international organizations such as Amnesty International evaluated the process of documentation as exceedingly difficult and [identified 324 of the victims](#), while emphasizing that the true numbers of the fatalities were likely much higher. Yet, it is somewhat astonishing that with all of its resources, personpower, and record in documenting atrocities at different times –especially in the pre-Internet age Latin America and Africa– Amnesty In-

ternational is yet to include many verifiably identified and well-known victims¹⁹ in its compiled and finalized [fatalities list](#). Such shortcomings on the part of the pioneering and most reputable organizations –organizations that have advocated on behalf of millions of justice-seeking victims throughout their existence– leave an open wound in the hearts and minds of many of the victims and their families, as well as advocates of international humanitarian law and global civil society activists.

While the Islamic Republic regime has remained dead silent on the final number of the slain in the November 2019 protests, several scholarly studies on mortality statistics issued by the Islamic Republic have engaged in a comparative longitudinal survey of death rates in this period and other periods. These statistics are issued by the “National Organization for Civil Registration of Iran [NOCRI]” – an entity controlled by the Islamic regime. Accordingly, a survey of the mortality rates in the months and quarters preceding and succeeding Fall of 2019 establishes an unexplained increase in nationwide mortalities in the fall of 2019 (adjusted for population). An [analysis](#) by University of Tilburg’s Assistant Professor of Political Science, Ammar Maleki, estimates the unaccounted deaths in the fall of 2019 to be around 8000. In another report [published](#) by Mahan Ghaffari, an epidemiologist researcher at the University of Oxford, the population-adjusted number of deaths in the fall of 2019 as compared to fall of 2018 is [more than 9000](#); an increase that doesn’t seem to correlate with any other known factor (according to Islamic regime’s own reported causes of deaths). In lieu of any other first-hand data, these indirect and comparative analyses based on the Islamic regime’s own released statistics support the hypothesis of a mass murder. Such a conspicuous oddity is more than a blip on the statistical horizon of death rates in Iran in 2019-2020. It is a bloody stain on the official public records of a regime with extraordinarily inhumane brutality. It is also illustrative of the regime’s utmost incompetence in covering up the evidentiary statistical forensics of their crimes against humanity.

The ambiguities and uncertainties of the atrocities of November 2019 is not limited to those murdered. To this day, almost three years since the protests of November 2019, the number of detainees –especially under-age detainees– is still unknown. The dark and bloody under-reported reality of the Bloody November is that combination of uncertainty, scarcity and/or absolute lack of knowledge that agonizes the families of the victims. They continue to persist in their pursuit of justice for their lost ones in the face the constant torturous pressure leveled upon them by the Islamic regime to keep them silent. This dark tragedy has been somewhat successfully obfuscated by the Islamic regime’s secrecy and targeted propaganda manipulations and tactics whose poisoned fruits continue to be

¹⁹For instance see [Nikta Esfandani](#), [Samaneh Zolghadr Mazlaghani](#), [Majid Feshki Farahani](#).

broadcast and redistributed by many Western media outlets and research think tanks.

In the following section we analyze the reporting methods of November 2019 events through a critical lens. We present an array of measures and techniques that have become an effective auxiliary machination for the Islamic regime to help it with entrenching its idealized reporting of the November 2019 protests and cover up the truth of the crimes it committed. Should major media outlets and think tanks continue in their witting or unwitting ignorance of such machinations, such methods may very well become a standard, tried-and-tested template for all murderous regimes around the world. Machinations that will help them with making any of their atrocities and crimes against humanity invisible from the world public opinion. However, a highly critical note must be made before our analytical presentation of these propaganda machinations. Human Rights organizations such as Human Rights Watch usually reference official sources and state media from inside Iran in their reports, without considering the fact that apart from heavy censorship, these official and regime-approved sources usually contain PR traps to misguide public opinion. Such citations function as delicate mechanisms to publish and disseminate the regime’s desired narrative of its atrocities. We find such practices tremendously disconcerting. With utmost charity, we are concerned, moreover, that such uncritical citations do effectively turn any such organization into unwitting active agents of the regime’s security apparatus propaganda.

2 The Mechanisms of “Making Crimes against Humanity Invisible”

In this section we discuss the propaganda mechanisms deployed by the regime to affect the media coverage through its active proxy agents –witting and unwitting– in reputable world press, media outlets, and think tanks.

2.1 Reporting and Broadcasting Mechanisms of the November 2019 Massacre

November 2019 saw the largest and bloodiest street protest crackdown since the revolution of 1979. The regime’s attempt to disrupt and confuse the flow of information was complex and sophisticated. The nationwide week-long complete shutdown of the Internet minimized the ability of many citizen reporters to document the regime’s atrocities through the publication of photos and videos on multiple platforms across the worldwide web. This delayed publication, which

in practice helped the regime in manipulating the narrative, combined with calculated denials, employment of various propaganda techniques, and occasional misinformed reporting on Iran by foreign media, aided the Islamic regime in muddying the facts around events of November 2019 and abetted it in the cover-up of its crimes.

As was stated early on in this report, our goal is to expose the mechanisms that enabled the regime to deny the massacre and obfuscate the truth around the protests of November 2019 in Iran. These mechanisms have proven particularly effective in confusing the world's public opinion, creating ambiguities about the nature and true agents of the atrocities, and eventually enabling the Islamic regime to deny the high death toll. The emergent consequence of such a successful propaganda campaign has been the continued repression of the victims' families, while keeping hundreds, if not thousands of detainees and their families in an agonizing silence.

2.2 The Game of “Expert Narratives”

At the core of the regime's propaganda campaign lie cohorts of recurring media pundits, think tank and NGO “experts” who reinforce the regime's favorite punchline: “the Islamic Republic did not commit anything out of the ordinary but responded to state-wide, run-amok, public anger against some normal and rudimentary gasoline price hike”. According to such “experts” who frequently parrot this regime punchline, the regime gasoline price hike was a necessary measure by the state in helping economic growth. Such statements promptly distract the audience from the broader context of great public dissatisfaction and normalize the brutal violence exerted upon civilians as defending public order against some street rioting vandals. The gasoline price hike is presented as an economic measure, as if the regime had no other choice and was totally blameless in adopting this measure without advanced notice to the public and without conducting public consultations. This claim is at best considered dubious by many independent Iranian economists. Consequently, the narrative of the causes of November 2019 is reduced to some obscure economic debate that affords the regime some legitimacy for the massacre. An example of such expert narrative can be found [here](#), [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#).

2.3 Deployment of Euphemism

Some reports, published both inside and outside of Iran, characterize the November 2019 protests through awkward phraseologies such as “urban incidence” and effectively use such atypical terminology to soften the criminality of both the act and the intent, while discounting the nationwide scale of the systematic massacre.

Use of such euphemisms to trivialize the November 2019 protests has helped the Islamic regime in its cover-up of the true scale of its most atrocious systematic crackdown. An example of such a report can be found [here](#) and [here](#).

2.4 Exaggerating the Effect of Sanctions and Denying the Fundamental Political and Socio-Economic Justice Demands of the Protests

The great emphasis posited upon the United States' withdrawal from JCPOA²⁰ and its critical role in causing the protests is an [astonishingly recurrent theme](#). The "US Sanctions' fault" is a [favorite ploy](#) of the Islamic regime's (unofficial) lobby in the US. Two groups have been integral in rendering the crimes of the Islamic Regime during Bloody Aban invisible as its witting and unwitting propaganda arms. The first are reporters, pundits, academics, and think tank analysts who have regularly shirked from professionally and conscientiously reporting and analyzing the humanitarian violations of the regime "resisting the hegemony of the US imperialism"; and second, the unofficial lobby of the Islamic regime, made up of a similar crowd of media, academic, and think tank elite, who have been the regular promoters of the Islamic Regime's propaganda lines – a group whose formidable record of apologizing for, and normalizing, the regime's corruption, incompetence, and frequent criminalities constitute worthy examples for a follow up volume on Thomas Rid's "[Active Measures](#)".²¹ The two groups shared two common threads, one general and the other more particular, in their attitude and action towards covering the November 2019 protests in particular and Iran in general.

The general common thread among both groups is manifestly their hypocritical humanitarian rhetoric of "blame the US for all world and/or Middle East problems" and let the anti-US tyrants off the hook with a rhetorical slap on the wrist approach for their alleged crimes. More astonishing, however, is the particular commonality of the two that manifested through their callous recourse to simplistic and trivializing "blaming-the-US-sanctions-à-la-carte-as-the-primary-cause-of-the-November-2019-protests" reasoning. Not only do the two groups seek to whitewash the atrocities committed by the Islamic regime through such a poorly veiled rhetorical approach, but they have also successfully and callously shifted the blame away from the Islamic regime –i.e. the main culprit– and laid

²⁰Joint Comprehensive Plan Of Action (JCPOA), an agreement on the Iranian nuclear program reached in Vienna on 14 July 2015, between Iran and the P5+1 and the European Union.

²¹Writing in German, Golineh Atai is one of the very few second generation Iranian diaspora authors who courageously sheds light on the many complex aspects of this normalization of the Iranian situation by many "experts". See Sonnenblumen Lady (Masih Alinejad) 271 - 272, *Wir und Iran* 300 - 301, and Epilog in [Iran – die Freiheit ist weiblich](#).

it squarely on the Trump Administration's maximum pressure campaign. In so doing, both groups have effectively acted as the aiders and abettors of the Islamic regime's Active Measures Operations, if not its very practical agents, in covering up its Bloody November crimes. Such "proxy propaganda agents" did indeed engage in such callous trivializations as a most repressive, violent, and bloody crackdown was still unfolding inside Iran at an unprecedented military scale against thousands of protesters and their families.

Even if one could grant these "journalists, pundits, and experts" the benefit of the doubt through invoking *reductio ad absurdum* and assign to the Trump administration all the blame for the decades' long tyrannical policies of the Islamic regime, we beg to ask this "most esteemed crowd" a simple question: Would Trump administration's (highly unlikely) culpability in causing all Iran's problems, **justify such a violent and bloody crackdown of hundreds of thousands of Iranian protesters?** Yet, in lieu of investigating and reporting on the ferocious actions of the Islamic Republic, these "experts" chose to pave the way for the Islamic regime to further obfuscate the truth about the origins of the protests and the commission of the bloody crackdown. We draw our readers' attention to examples of such callous reporting and analysis [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#).

2.5 Disproportionate Focus on "Vandalism", in lieu of Focusing on Death Tolls and the Usage of Labels such as "Vandals" and "Rioters" to Defame Non-violent Protesters

A considerable number of reports, especially those featuring photos and video clips, have attempted to whitewash the tragic human cost of the protests by the sophisticated and selective use of photography that allegedly point to the existence of a deliberate attempt by the protesters at incurring damage to properties, vandalizing banks or gas stations, while actively omitting the photography that amply corroborates the violent state aggression inflicting death and carnage upon thousands of protesters, passersby, and bystanders. The brutal violence exerted upon people by the regime, alongside the names and photos of those killed have been sanitized, ignored or edited out by a disproportionate emphasis on extensive vandalism. **Effectively, many of these reports' selective usage of photography depicting vandalized property has supplemented the Islamic regime's security forces and its propaganda machine with much needed exculpatory justification for their overwhelming violent military-scale response to the protest as the unsung heroes acting in defense of public and private property whose vandalization had to be**

stopped by any means necessary. By re-constructing the protests as that of a nationwide vandalism of thousands of vandals and depicting the regime’s military-scale atrocities as “self-defense”, these reports distract from thousands of casualties and the loss of life. Yet, such a selective, partial, and parsimonious “account” of events surrounding “vandalism”, persists in a most unprofessional delinquency that fails to mention the fact that the consistent pattern of vandalism and damage to specific types of property (vehicles, banks, gas stations) could have been instigated and **carried out** by the Islamic regime’s security forces, as **repeatedly documented** by **many citizen journalists**. Examples of such reporting can be found [here](#), [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#).

2.6 Neglecting the Islamic Regime’s Use of Heavy Weapons

Deployment and usage of heavy military-grade weapons in the November 2019 crackdowns is conspicuously absent from many media outlet reports of these events, rendering their audience completely unaware of the scope of the “limited, yet total war” that was leveled upon innocent civilians in Iran in November 2019. Such an apparent oversight can even be seen in [some expert-level reports](#) on the origins and course of the crackdown where they fail to mention this critical fact at all. We should note that various witness testimonies, documented photos and videos as well as other evidence point to the deployment and usage of military-grade heavy weaponry during the protests. An example of such reports can be found [here](#) and [here](#).

3 Socio-political Contexts and Common Misconceptions and Misrepresentation About the Islamic Republic and Iran

The November 2019 protests in Iran are often characterized by reductionist rhetoric and terminology such as “gasoline-price-hike-induced and/or caused-by-US-sanctions” in Persian and non-Persian media. Bloody November was not a linear and local incident that was limited to one city or some suburbs. Despite this fact, the media coverage of these events and the regime’s atrocities is often compared to European and North American urban riots in various reports. In discussing the misrepresentations of the socio-political situation in Iran, we first discuss the Islamic Republic of Iran’s complex structure and how its misrepresentation has negatively affected fact-based reporting of the November 2019 massacres. Next, we discuss how similar misrepresentations of the Iranian economic context have negatively impacted the coverage of November 2019 massacres. In

this section, we seek to explain the complicated reality of decades-long combined socio-economic and political repression. We are adamant that this complexity is routinely analyzed in its most simplistic and shallow form and repackaged in the box of the US-sanctions-did-it-all and then is broadcast to the Free World for media consumption. The following section accounts for such complexities by discussing the socio-economic and political contexts, thus setting the record straight and hopefully providing the platform for future research by those who are solely committed to understanding and reporting the truth about the real and undoctored condition of affairs in Iran.

3.1 The Political Context: the Labyrinth of the Islamic Republic's Political System

The majority of reports on November 2019 employ a simplistic, superficial and one-dimensional analytical framework for understanding the novel paradigm of protests in Iran – a paradigm that has either escaped the eyes of the analysts altogether until now, or has intentionally been reduced to a limited and passing grievance, primarily caused by the US sanctions. Rather than being a critical framework to offer some approximate grasp of the reality on the ground in Iran, such a framework is used to distort the facts and prop up the regime's propaganda rhetoric.

Such a framework further obfuscates the realities of Iran by misinforming the uninitiated non-Iranian minds about the complex political structure of the Islamic Republic regime. The regime's hypocritical constitutionalism is one that disguises its authoritarian theocratic institutional core by an ostensible "elected" representative parliament and presidency. Both of the latter have historically and invariably had to bow to the whims and wishes of the ruling clergy and their confederate revolutionary guards' commanders overriding the elected institutions' executive and legislative agenda for their corrupt purposes. Consequently, the supposed separation of power and the somewhat haphazard "popular representation" is all but a facade that has been aptly used as a weapon by the regime's apologists in the "expert" and "media" community outside Iran as one with some capacity for "democratic reform".

In sum, the regime's complex and intertwined political and military apparatus relies on countless mutually reinforcing built-in mechanisms of repression. These mechanisms are enshrined in the law and enforced through a labyrinth of the Supreme Leader's decrees as well as many written and unwritten security-intelligence and military measures. The complex legislative, state-decreed, and executive protections grant almost all officials from mid-ranking field agents and commanders all the way to the top military and security-intelligence brass im-

munity from prosecution. The legalized impunity firewall that protects this wide array of officials from prosecution is itself enshrined in law through legislative or state-decreed measures. Such legislation does not only absolve the mid-ranking commanders to the top ruling echelon of the regime of any and all crimes annotated in the regime's Islamic Penal Code, but it in fact obliges them to resort to legislated repressive measures. This quintessential structural and individual "impunity through legal immunity for authorities", [as delineated by UN Human Rights Rapporteur on Iran](#), acts as an effective mechanism for rendering all crimes against humanity committed by the state invisible.

3.1.1 Role of the Supreme National Security Council

Yet another overlooked component of the Islamic Republic's political structure is the "[Supreme National Security Council](#)" (SNSC) and its crucial role in various bloody crackdowns. SNSC is the highest decision-making council at times of nationwide unrest and street protests. At the same time, the council has had an important role in overcoming the internal conflicts among various regime entities and planning and organizing the crackdown of almost all protests over the previous three decades.

The SNSC's role as the main intermediary between various repressive organizations, i.e. the machinery of state's management of oppression and the political decision-making apparatus, has turned into a crisis-control mechanism from within the regime. This has enabled it to simultaneously act as an institution for resolving and managing internal and systematic conflicts within the Islamic regime. As such, the role and effectiveness of the SNSC in orchestrating bloody suppressions, and its effectuation of swift and reinforced nationwide massacres, is of eminent importance but has rarely been studied or reported by non-Iranian media outlets or think tanks.

[Article 176](#) of the Islamic Republic's [constitution](#) stipulates the SNSC's mandate in 3 parts. The first part assigns to the SNSC the duty to lay down defense and security policies strictly within the boundaries determined by the Supreme Leader. Organizationally, the SNSC's role should be understood as the Islamic Republic's conflict resolution apparatus. It is tasked to minimize conflict among various state entities and at once maximize the regime's various agencies' coordination and mobilization to successfully repress any popular protest or uprising; specially, all that are perceived to pose an existential threat to the totality of the regime.

The aforementioned factors in this section are rarely referred to in reports and are sometimes intentionally omitted in the media. Barring the [Rand report](#) that partially covers SNSC, the complex power dynamics and atrocious techniques planned, coordinated, and deployed by this constitutionally enshrined apparatus

of the Islamic Republic has hardly ever been noticed.

The analytical framework of many so-called “experts” and pundits on Iranian affairs in disentangling the complicated and multi-dimensional phenomena in Iran is at best lacking and in some cases follows a disinformation campaign agenda. This can be clearly seen in the worldwide coverage of state atrocities in Iran such as the November 2019 massacre. In lieu of such an outlook, reporting on state atrocities in Iran have fallen victim to reductionist and systemic treatment that scapegoats the US sanctions terms as a most favored rhetoric of authoritarian regimes including the Islamic Republic.

3.2 The Economic Context

Understanding the economic context of the November 2019 protests is critical, especially because many reports and analysis use keywords such as “gasoline price hike” and “US economic sanctions” to account for the root causes of Bloody November. While it is indisputable that changes in price of fuel had a rippling effect on every sector of the economy, ignoring the dire state of the Iranian economy over the decades prior to November 2019 lends itself to a narrative in which the entirety of Bloody November can be reduced to an accidental, inconsequential and singular event limited to a few scattered urban protests.

The 2005-2013 period under President Ahmadinejad was a most catastrophic socio-economic period for Iran, the ramifications of which would plague Rouhani’s administration until its very last day in 2021. The greatest irony of Ahmadinejad’s eight-year presidency was the unprecedented petro-dollar boom, the largest in Iran’s history since the discovery of oil in Iran in March 1908. Indeed, to the nation’s astonishment and disbelief, this historically unparalleled era of boom in petrodollar revenues also marked the era of astronomical levels of impoverishment only comparable with the early 1900s – the very period that led to the 1906-1907 Iranian constitutional revolution. The astronomical \$700 billion revenue was all but squandered under Ahmadinejad’s watch, thanks partly to the Islamic Republic’s ambitious and costly nuclear program, causing the greatest income inequality since 1979 and thrusting millions into abject poverty on an unprecedented historical scale. Not only did the country not see any meaningful economic growth under Ahmadinejad, but it rather plunged into bouts of stagflation. The steep inflation curve continued to soar with the regime’s persistence in pursuing its wrongheaded macroeconomic and trade policies. The generous trade deals with China that led to the import of highly competitive Chinese products –with which the drained and underdeveloped Iranian industries could simply not compete– led to an accelerating chain reaction of industrial bankruptcies that had reached a critical mass by the end of Ahmadinejad’s second term. This in turn caused mass underemployment and unemployment of hundreds of thousands of

factory workers. The compounding effect of hundreds of cases of embezzlement and theft of public funds, fraud, corruption and larceny reached a whole new level, even compared to the Islamic Republic's own disastrous track record, as the regime itself had engaged in an international money laundering scheme in order to "go around the sanctions" through a scheme dubbed by Supreme Leader Khamenei "the Resistance Economy".

In June 2013, after eight years of Ahmadinejad's chaotic presidency, Hassan Rouhani campaigned on a platform of far-fetched promises with the key slogan of "hope and prudence". Indeed, it was this platform that convinced millions of hesitant Iranians to go to the polls despite their misgivings about rubber stamping yet another vetted candidate of the ruling clerics. Rouhani was thus elected to the presidency with an ostensible mandate to fight corruption and restore some semblance of economic prosperity, respect for citizens' basic civil rights, and the rule of law at the domestic level. At the core of Rouhani's campaign platform lay the promise of normalizing the Islamic regime's foreign relations with the rest of the world that had gone totally haywire under Ahmadinejad – of course with the support and blessing of Supreme Leader Khamenei. Accordingly, Rouhani promised that his administration would strike a mutually negotiated deal with the world powers over the future of the Islamic regime's highly costly nuclear program and the phased lifting of all international, UN mandated, economic sanctions.

The national halo of optimism engendered by Rouhani's election soon faded into oblivion and was replaced by a nationwide frustration, a frustration that expressly manifested itself through chronic protests by various public sector employees, notably teachers, and pensioners, as well as factory workers from private and public sectors. The monstrous beast of corruption, fraud and large-scale theft and embezzlement had by now grown into a behemoth whose taming would require a great purge of many of the high-ranking ruling clerics, Friday Imams, revolutionary guards' commanders, and their respective families. The colossal corruption now ran all the way down to mid-tier and low-tier bureaucrats and authorities in almost every corner of the regime's apparatus. To complicate matters further, Rouhani's administration kept forcing the Central Bank to print money that caused the Iranian Rial to devalue against the US dollar and drove the country into a run-amok hyper-inflationary situation. The economic reports based on statistics published in Islamic regime's state-owned media show that the largest increase in money supply after the 1979 revolution occurred during Hassan Rouhani's presidency: [more than 700%](#) over his 8 years in office.

On the foreign policy front, on July 14, 2015 the multilateral negotiations over Islamic regime's nuclear program finally concluded. The Joint Comprehensive Plan Of Action (JCPOA) between Iran and P5+1 was signed in Vienna. On January 16, 2016 JCPOA went into effect and a large portion of US economic sanctions were lifted. As the government celebrated its diplomatic victory by seal-

ing JCPOA, Iranians were anxiously awaiting to see some positive change in the state of the economy. Yet, the ever expanding systematic corruption, intensification of the already existing kleptocracy, further monopolization of the economic opportunities by the Khamenei-IRGC-Rouhani inner-circle, and the continuation of blatant nepotism at all levels of state administration exponentially infuriated and frustrated millions of Iranians day-by-day as they struggled to put bread on the table and not get evicted from their humble abodes in the face soaring rents and leasing rates across the country. Moreover, the unprecedented increase in money supply meant that almost no positive impact was felt in people's financial situation, even after most of the US sanctions were lifted. In other words, the impact of the international/unilateral sanctions on the Iranian economy was not fundamental enough for the sanction reliefs to have any meaningful impact on ordinary Iranians' bottom line. Before November 2019, the perpetual decline of the economy had already caused two nation-wide protests – first in December 2016/January 2017 and second in July 2017 – both of which were brutally and violently cracked down by the Islamic regime.

Thus, as was iterated earlier, this socio-economic powder keg was just awaiting some spark to set off its fuse past the point of no return for an all-out explosion. The spark came in the form of the unannounced gasoline price hike which went on to initiate the largest street protests in contemporary Iranian history.

It is worth stressing that despite the lifting of sanctions in 2015, the hyper-inflationary economy did not abate. This underscores the fact that the international economic sanctions cannot be considered as a primary contributor to the November 2019 protests – despite the claims of the Islamic regime's usual media apologists and “blame the US for all world problems“ pundits and analysts. The culmination of long-held and worsening public grievances and the ever-expanding socio-political repression to which Iranians had been subjected over the previous decades seems to have convinced them that the gasoline price hike meant they were in fact plunging further into the socio-economic abyss. Consequently, many came out protesting, convinced that save for an all-out uprising, they would never be able to escape the dark and endless tunnel of poverty and misery in which they and their families were trapped for years on end. A prevailing characteristic of recent protests in Iran is that any form of gathering will inevitably turn into an all-out protest against the entirety of the regime. The explicit anti-regime slogans of these protests points to a shared, deep-seated angst and fury among the people toward the entire political system; a deep outrage towards a regime whose decisions have cost the public in the form of a devastated and imploded economy and skyrocketing poverty.

3.2.1 Suburbia and Suburban Slums: The Telling Tale of Impoverishment and Decades-long Socio-Economic Catastrophe

An often overlooked fact in analyzing contemporary Iranian protests is the Islamic Republic's culpability in creating intractable socio-economic problems on a nationwide scale, especially since the last round of urban protests in 2009 and 2010. Chief among these socio-economic problems is the unprecedented soaring of urban slums and shanty towns around large and small cities. The dire economic situation of the working classes, socio-political repression of the former middle classes –who have now joined the ranks of struggling working classes– along with the expansion of slums, have a clear, logical and extensive correlation with the recent waves of protests in Iran and their repeated resurfacing. This recurring cycle of protests that started in January 2017, heightened in November 2019, and continues to this day, is a reaction to a piling up of failures in almost all economic, social and political aspects of life in Iran.

Hyperinflation, continuous reduction of purchasing power and state-induced environmental catastrophe²² have directly contributed to the destruction of many small towns and villages and their respective subsistence agricultural economy. Combined with government corruption at all levels, the resulting steep decline in the economy has caused the slums to balloon around small and large cities in Iran over the past decade. A [report](#) published through the state's own media channels, claims that 30 (of the 31) provinces in Iran are struggling with the crisis of the slums. A [report](#) published by the Islamic Republic's Ministry of Roads and Urban Development admits that the population of Iranians living in slums has quintupled from 4.5 millions in 2004 to more than 20 millions in 2019 (the country's population was ~82 million in 2019 – meaning 1 out of 4 Iranians lived in a slum in 2019 based on the regime's own numbers). This critical statistic pinpoints these slums as the precise geographical flashpoints of a majority of the protests in recent years. Labeling the protests as “vandal mobs” or “urban riots” is simply brushing away and denying the fact that more than 1/4th of the Iranian population is now living in urban slums.

²²The extremely disastrous state of the environment and the ongoing state-induced environment catastrophe in Iran is an entire story in its own right. A critical piece of this environmental tragedy is the incompetent and overtly corrupt dam construction mafia in the Islamic Republic; a group which is intimately entangled with the IRGC and its various “Construction and Engineering Corps” and front companies.

4 Documentation of November 2019 Atrocities: Coverage, Undercoverage, and Cover-Up

In this section, we discuss various mechanisms deployed by the regime to undermine the documentation and exposure of the crimes that help it to cover up its crimes systematically.

4.1 Regime's Access-peddling as a Mechanism of Controlling the Flow and Content of Information out of Iran

The free reporting of the November 2019 protests –especially by citizen journalists from inside Iran– was stifled by the nationwide and complete blockade of the internet. With the internet going dark, the already whimpering voice of the Iranian citizen journalists was completely shut down. To date, the operation of foreign media outlets is extremely limited. The regime has effectively created an access-peddling mechanism whereby any journalist, major media outlet or world renowned press that wishes to have a desk in Tehran is forced to toe the regime's propaganda line. The case of Washington Post's Jason Rezaian's detention in Iran and other similar cases stand as ample evidence of the regime's repressive access-peddling mechanisms that are designed to turn the free press outside Iran into an arm of its propaganda. Consequently, these media outlets are either not allowed to operate inside Iran, or if they are, their operations are under heavy scrutiny and accompanied by very complicated and continuous examination processes by the Islamic regime. In the very first hours of the outbreak of the protests in November 2019, the SNSC sent a letter to all domestic media –from newspapers to news agencies– proclaiming they are [forbidden from broadcasting](#) any news or report regarding the ongoing protests and the crackdowns.

In addition to the aforementioned Rezaian case, the cases of journalists such as [Nicolas Pelham](#) (The Economist's Middle East correspondent at the time) and [Natalie Amiri](#) (The ARD –German public service broadcaster– reporter in Iran at the time) attest to the exertion of pressure, oppression and threatening of journalists by the Islamic regime. These tactics are meant to compel the foreign journalists to incorporate the Islamic regime's desired narratives into their reporting and covering of the events inside Iran. This technique has resulted in reports that usually cause a great deal of confusion about the on-the-ground realities of Iran in the mind of the uninitiated non-Iranian reader. The foreign media journalists working in Iran often resort to outright omissions, or skewed reporting of events in Iran, out of fear of losing their press permits and credentials.

4.2 Under-Coverage and Mis-Reporting of November 2019 After the Crackdown as a Mechanism to Undermine the Documentation of the Crimes

The next phase of covering Bloody November was exposing the details and scale of the November 2019 protests and the continued crackdown long after the protests had been suppressed. Several international media organizations published analytical reports covering the events. The main source of their estimates and statistics has usually and inertly been –and still is– the official counts published by the Islamic regime, with the occasional reference to Amnesty International’s reports. An example can be seen [here](#).

Such reports and analyses can be divided into two categories: first, those that appraised the November 2019 protests as a turning point unlike any of the previous protests; and second, those that reduced the protests to mere mundane grievances by the poor and dispossessed –never failing to point out that the protests were incited by the Trump administration or induced by the US sanctions– and compared the fuel prices in Iran to average international prices (often accompanied by a statement applauding the regime for their “economically sound” decision), [discounting all aspects of the Bloody November](#) as some economic debate.

4.3 Regime’s Judicial and Security Mechanisms to Undermine the Documentation of the Crimes and its efforts at systematic coverup

The Islamic regime’s historical record in committing crimes against humanity, especially the [1988 massacre](#) where thousands of political prisoners were mass murdered over a course of few weeks clearly demonstrates that documentation of the massacre is the most critical part of our struggle against mass amnesia. A survey done by Iran Fact Records demonstrates that at least 16 different methods were used to carry out the murder or effectuate [Enforced Disappearance](#) of the protesters and dissidents of November 2019 protests. Some of these methods have never been mentioned in any of the public reports published by various human rights organizations. It should be noted that in order to preserve the safety of many witnesses and sources who have helped us with the compilation of the instances of the following sixteen methods, we cannot reveal the ways and means of arriving at them. The methods include:

-
1. **Refusing** to admit the injured to hospitals
 2. **Abandoning** the victims' bodies in the vicinity of their families' residences
 3. **Disposing** of the bodies in waterways, canals and dams
 4. Conduct of torture after arrest, leading to **committing of suicide** by the victims inside prison or after their discharge from prison
 5. **Sentencing** the victims to death, after their deportation to Iran (mainly from Turkey)
 6. Killing the victims in the mountainous western regions of Iran, after their deportation to Iran (mainly from Turkey)
 7. Commission of **mass murder** with heavy weapons and automatic machine guns (Mahshahr Massacre)
 8. **Killing** of protesters in the streets by excessive strikes of electroshock weapons and batons
 9. Killing of protesters by snipers from rooftops and other elevated surfaces
 10. **Killing** of protesters by snipers from ground level
 11. **Killing** of protesters by indiscriminate shooting into crowds and bystanders
 12. **Shooting** and killing the protesters by machine-gun mounted helicopters and drones
 13. Targeted and random shooting and **killing** in residential and commercial spaces
 14. Killing of protesters under torture in prison after their arrest
 15. Levying heavy **psychological pressure** on the family and parents of victims, leading them to commit suicide
 16. Discounting the displaced, non-documented and marginalized citizens (Iranians or Afghan refugees alike)

4.4 Preying on the Undocumented Poor

The ongoing effects of the November 2019 bloody crackdown cannot be exaggerated. Some of the victims' family members have successfully or unsuccessfully attempted [suicide](#). A number of suicide attempts have been committed by those who have received prison sentences; some of which have been [documented](#) and [reported](#) on. Many detainees have also been subjected to excruciating torture, such as fake executions inside prisons. The former and released detainees have been rearrested on the anniversary of the protests and subjected to renewed prosecution.

The regime's campaign of terror against the families of the victims as well as the detainees has made documenting the atrocities a daunting and often almost impossible task. Indeed, a major difficulty in documenting the atrocities is the categorical sociological differences between the protesters of the November 2019 protests and protesters of the previous eras. Many of the previous eras' protesters were students, workers and women's rights advocates and activists. A majority of November 2019 protesters were average working class citizens with no background in political or social activism. Consequently, the families of most of the victims do not belong to influential, powerful or vocal social and political classes. They usually face many hurdles in their attempt to reach out to international, human rights and media organizations. In such an atmosphere, the Islamic Republic has repeatedly forced these families to keep silent; usually coercing them into submission by threatening other members and children of the family with detention or outright harm. Many of these families lack the financial means, knowledge or sufficient information needed for following up on their loved ones, the detainees or the relatives of the murdered victims alike. In many documented cases, the bodies of the victims have been forcibly, and without the family's consent, buried in remote villages or areas – far away from the family's residence or where they were murdered. Some families have been forced to pay "Bullet Fees" (i.e., the cost of the military ammunition used to murder their relatives) as well as all other charges imposed upon them by the state authorities before they were able to recover their family members' remains. Some family members of the victims have been arrested and sentenced to long prison terms, for the crime of following up with their loved one's cases; another tragic reality that is rarely mentioned in the reports published by Human Rights organizations on November 2019 protests. Several protesters who managed to flee the country into neighboring Turkey were unfortunately deported back to Iran by the Turkish government and were subsequently sentenced to death by the Islamic regime.

Recalling the slums crisis in Iran, a considerable portion of the population living in these slums and impoverished suburbs have no identification documents. As a significant number of protesters hail from these slums and working class

suburbs, the absence of proper documentation has allowed the regime to carry out a campaign of abductions and Enforced Disappearance against the November 2019 protesters without much friction or worrying about possible exposure.

The Enforced Disappearance operation has hit the Afghanistani migrant community even more gravely. Many of the suburban slums in Iran are home to an unknown number of Afghanistani immigrants. A notable example of such slums are the ones around Shahriar, a town near the Iranian capital of Tehran. Consequently, no one can be sure of the number of Afghanistani citizens who lost their lives during the Bloody November massacres; or how many of their family members have been deported by the Islamic regime to conceal the truth and derail any potential demand for justice.

5 The Crisis of Broad, Serious and Ongoing Human Rights Abuses in Iran

It is important to have a close look at the impunity crisis as it relates to the bleak state of human rights abuses and recurring cycles of violence against the people in Iran. In reality, the crisis of impunity has allowed the Islamic regime to commit broad and repeated violence en masse against the Iranian people. On October 26, 2021, the [UN's Third Committee's report](#) on the state of Human Rights in Iran was presented by Javaid Rehman (Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran). This report, which was published almost two years after the bloody events of November 2019, features significant insights about the state of uber-crisis of human rights in Iran, which can be categorized in 3 important parts:

1. Detailing the practice of issuing and execution of death sentences under secrecy –especially prevalent in minority communities– based on flawed and fallacious judicial processes, and subsequent hiding of the bodies, preventing the families of the executed from knowing where their loved ones are buried.
2. Emphasizing the egregious characteristics of the Islamic regime's authorities in their brutal and ultra-violent handling of any protests, pointing to the Khuzestan water protests of 2021 as a recent example. The report describes the violent oppression of the Iranian people by the Islamic regime as a chronic pattern which led to the murder of “hundreds” of individuals in November 2019.
3. The third and most prominent part of the report discusses the crisis of impunity embedded in the Islamic regime's political struc-

ture. This impunity continues to allow the perpetrators to go absolutely unpunished [and in many cases get rewarded] for their criminal and murderous acts. The report uses the Islamic Republic's June 2021 Presidential Elections and the ascendance of Ebrahim Raisi into power as a clear example of this impunity crisis. Ebrahim Raisi was a member of the "death committee" and is one of the authorities known to have been heavily involved in the 1988 mass execution of political prisoners in Iran. He is the most prominent Islamic regime's senior official who still represents the malevolent cycle of atrocities in Iran; from the horrifying mass executions of summer of 1988 to the bloody street murders of fall of 2019 and beyond – a cycle that continues to consume lives in Iran to this day.

Based on what was described here, documenting the truth is deeply entangled with the impunity crisis in Iran. This has enabled the Islamic Republic's authorities to find new ways for escaping from taking on any responsibility and creating judicial immunity for themselves. Obscuring the facts around the numbers, statistics, methods and processes of the committed atrocities can be considered as the Islamic regime's main blueprint for addressing and "resolving" the questions around November 2019. In practice, the Islamic Republic has used, and continues to use, unapologetic pseudo-legalisms, rejecting any responsibility for its role in the atrocities as part of its campaign to conceal the truth and prevent any attempt at its discovery.

The international intergovernmental organizations, in general, favor the position of the Islamic Republic, as a majority of these bodies are dominated by like-minded despotic and/or authoritarian regimes. They fear that setting any precedents that help uncover the truth of the Bloody November atrocities in Iran may one day be invoked against them. Besides this apparent bias of many member states that may impulsively vote in favor of the Islamic Republic for having exercised its sovereign rights, other member states are simply blind-sided by their lack of familiarity with the complex inner workings of the Islamic regime. Although the same biases and structural inabilities to comprehend the complexities of repression do not apply to international humanitarian and human rights NGOs, they, too, are either victims of the regime's access-peddling machinations –the same that have rendered the world-renowned press and media outlets from covering Iran competently– or are simply staffed by a cadre whose record of reporting atrocities places them in "Blame-the-US-for-all-the-problems-of-the-world" camp. These international intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations also often have astonishingly naïve expectations of such a regime to prosecute its own security forces and state-sponsored paramilitary loyalists for their crimes and

atrocities.

Persian-speaking human rights organizations seem to be most competent when it comes to reporting celebrated and renowned Iranian activists, lawyers, and other types of issue-based (labor, student, and women's rights) advocates and totally incompetent when the victims are average working class citizens and their families who have no claim to fame through politics or activism. Unfortunately these organizations have failed in presenting a realistic picture of the regime's oppressive apparatus to the international intergovernmental organizations and international humanitarian law authorities. Such shortcomings have caused many governments and international organizations to steer clear from holding the Islamic Republic accountable for its crimes. Meanwhile, organizations such as Human Rights Watch do not even have a cohesive and sound analytical framework for their reporting, which places their work in stark contrast even in comparison with Amnesty International and other organizations that have a more transparent –and nonetheless equally out of touch with the average working class victims of the regime's atrocities– approach. It is no wonder that Human Rights Watch has been forced to rewrite their reports of the same events all too often.

In conclusion, it is the witting and unwitting structural and human resources' shortcomings of many entities –from media outlets, think tank and pundits to international intergovernmental and nongovernmental organizations– covering the state of affairs in Iran that has made them incapable of appreciating the peculiar characteristics of Islamic Republic's political structure. As a result, the world continues to be largely confused about the mechanisms through which the Islamic regime in Iran carries out and obfuscates its atrocities (for instance, see section 3.1.1 where we covered the role of the Supreme National Security Council within the Islamic regime's apparatus). International organizations (intergovernmental and Human Rights NGOs alike), international media and Persian-speaking diaspora media have thus helped the Islamic regime in taking advantage of the confused, incomplete and often obfuscated image of the realities on the ground in Iran insofar as they pertain to the mechanisms and systematic processes of the atrocities committed by the Islamic Republic regime. The impacts of such a chaotic outlook is demonstrably illustrated in the UN General Assembly's Third Committee's report (presented on October 25, 2021) and also in the Aban Tribunal (held in November 2021).

It is our hope that with this report we have been able to give some voice to many victims of the Islamic Republic's Bloody November atrocities as well as the victims of its many other human rights violations. It is indeed upon this hope that we dedicate this report to the Movement for Truth and Justice in Iran.